

Frontispiece.

THE FORT OF VIZIADROOG.

REMINISCENCES
OF AN
INDIAN POLICE OFFICIAL

BY
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Illustrated
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PREFACE.

It is to be regretted that old Anglo-Indian Officials, especially those whose lives have been passed in the interior as Magistrates, Superintendents of Police, and the like, do not more often employ the time, that we are told hangs so heavily on their hands after retirement, in jotting down some of their experiences for the benefit of the public in England, whose ideas of Official life in India, of the mode in which the country is governed, and of the idiosyncrasies of its people are still of the crudest.

Especially as to the "seamy side" of the character of the mixed population could police officers contribute much that would not only be very good reading, but that would also prove highly instructive to their younger brethren just commencing life.

General Hervey, who was for many years employed in the Department for the Suppression of Thuggee, has recently set an admirable example of what might be done in that direction.

It is true that incidents rarely occur in India which would furnish material for tales "*à la* Gaboriau," or that could vie in interest with the

“Hansom Cab Mystery.” Highly scientific murder is happily as yet unknown in India; jewels worth fabulous amounts are not often made away with;* the trained intelligence of detective geniuses of the Lecocq type is rarely called for—which is fortunate, inasmuch as the Indian police, as at present organised, is destitute of the detective element, as understood in Europe.

A very rough-and-ready investigation ordinarily suffices to bring home his guilt to the average Indian criminal. As a matter of fact, the commoner offences—murders, manslaughters, and thefts—have usually been traced to the perpetrators before the constable makes his appearance, and he finds that the patel (or head man) and the humble mhar (village watchman) have already got the offender in custody. It only remains for the constable to get the case into order and to supply—which he is very ingenious in doing—any gaps in the chain of evidence. After this it runs the usual monotonous course—to the nearest Magistrate or to the Sessions, as the case may be.

But, as every experienced Official knows, there are thousands of serious crimes that are not only never discovered, but never even reported; there are many reported that never occurred; and careful observation over a number of years shows that there are flushes or epidemics, as it were, of particular classes of crime, and there are others which are peculiar to particular castes and races.

* Though His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught was robbed of valuable jewels between Rawal-Pindi and Poona.

If a few leading cases from the note-book of an old Anglo-Indian Police Official in the Bombay Presidency can throw any light on any of these matters, I shall rejoice that my scribblings during a long period of sickness and suffering have not been entirely useless.

No one can live for thirty-five years in India without being drawn into deep sympathy with the people, without recognising the many virtues they possess, and the numerous good qualities which have survived ages of anarchy and persecution. It is in no hostile spirit, therefore, that allusion will hereafter be made to certain weaknesses, certain conspicuous failings of character, which force themselves to the front. They are largely compensated for by good traits; such as unbounded hospitality, kindness of disposition, the rugged fidelity of the servant to his master, which come back to our minds in very practical form when we have left India for good. It is my earnest hope that in bringing out the darker side of Indian character I may also have thrown light on some of the better qualities of the people among whom I have lived so long.

On the other hand, I trust I may have shown the need for incessant watchfulness in the administration of a conglomeration of nationalities, creeds and castes such as exist in India. We habitually shut our eyes in India—as in other Colonies—believe that all is going on for the best, and abhor pessimists. But, trite saying though it be, that in India we walk on a slumbering volcano—the truth of it is now and again brought home to us with startling vividness, and an

incident here or there reveals to us, for the moment, the glow of the molten mass on the crust of which we walk so blithely.

In these pages, I have endeavoured with all humility to utter certain warnings which, even a year ago, would have been denounced as mere ravings. Yet they have been justified very amply since! And on this very day when I despatch my last proof, an ominous cloud hangs over the dominions of Her Majesty the Queen Empress. It may—let us hope that it will—disperse.

T. C. ARTHUR.

11th May, 1894.

P.S.—The following tales are not “stories,” or in any sense inventions. I could give chapter and verse, could refer to existing records in verification of them; and although it has been necessary to give fictitious names occasionally, I can assure my readers that in almost every case I was personally concerned, and that the others in some way or other came under my personal cognizance.

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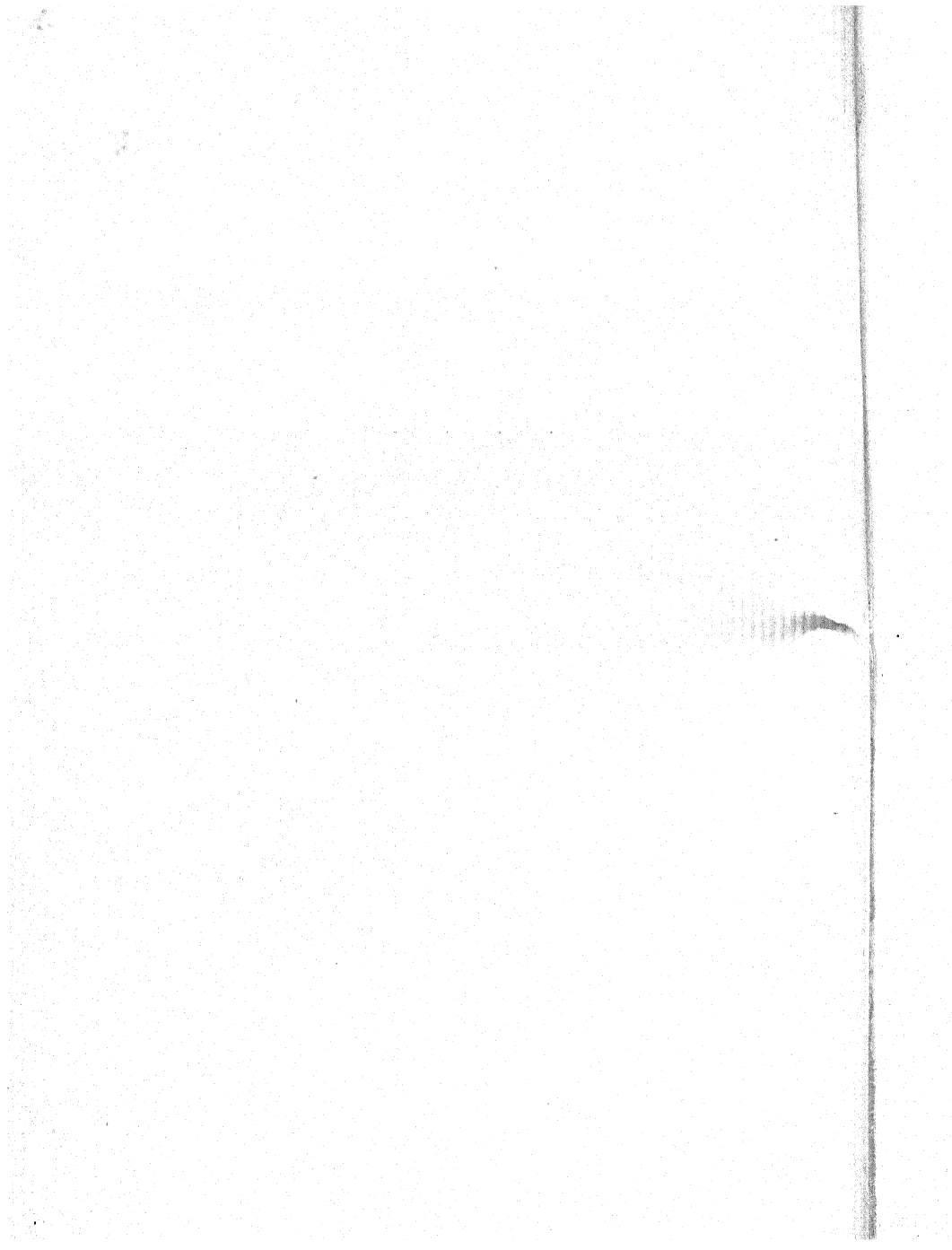
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REMINISCENCES

OF AN

INDIAN POLICE OFFICIAL.

CHAPTER I.

VINDICTIVENESS.—ANONYMOUS LETTERS.—THE
WOULD-BE PARRICIDE.

ANONYMOUS LETTERS.

LOOKING back on all these years, I have come to the conclusion that by far the worst feature in native character is vindictiveness, and that it accounts for nearly all the worst crimes in the calendar. The slightest thing arouses it, and it stops at nothing. Its favourite arena is the criminal court, its favourite weapon anonymous accusation.

I wonder how many anonymous letters are received in the public offices in India in a single day, and how many of them have the smallest foundation of fact !

Yet it is by no means safe, especially for a Police Officer, to disregard this means of obtaining information ; but it requires no little judgment and

discrimination in dealing with it. At least ninety out of a hundred are vague, scurrilous, obviously malicious, and untrue, and can be at once consigned to the waste-paper basket. A small percentage may serve as warnings, or to put an Officer on his guard against events that are about to happen, or to indicate public feeling in disturbed times; a very small number will relate facts, or will make specific accusations supported by evidence that can be verified.

These last must, of course, be inquired into promptly, but with the utmost caution, lest grievous wrong be done to innocent persons. In most such cases it will sooner or later be discovered that the "bin name urzi," or anonymous letter, was the first step in an elaborate and diabolical conspiracy to injure an enemy.

I remember, for example, once receiving an anonymous letter accusing the "patel," or headman of a village, of having drowned a widow of his family, whose heir he was. Some dozen persons were named, some of whom were alleged to have witnessed the murder, others to have seen the patel throw the body into a disused well with a stone tied round its neck.

In the preliminary inquiry by a chief constable every one of the persons named gave evidence in accordance with the anonymous letter. But, to my mind, the evidence appeared far too good; and, hastening to the spot, I soon found that *none* of it could be true, and that the old widow had actually

died of cholera, and had been cremated in the usual public manner.

Another anonymous letter received in the village informed me that the "kulkarnee," or village accountant, had got up the plot and drafted the first letter; his house was searched, and the rough draft in his handwriting was actually found among his papers. Ten of the gang were then indicted for conspiracy, and received heavy sentences at the sessions.

It is not often, however, that discovery is so rapid, and then grievous and prolonged suffering is unavoidably occasioned to the innocent accused. The following case, the record of which no doubt still exists in a certain sessions court, is so remarkable in every way that I shall relate it in detail, styling it—

THE WOULD-BE PARRICIDE.

One beautiful evening in November I found myself at the end of a wearisome march under the Syadri Ghauts, or mountains, in the South Konkan. I had recently attained to the dignity of Acting Superintendent of Police, and, as a part of my duty, I had to travel over the spurs running down from the Ghauts, and to place here and there, at the most advantageous spots, as many police posts as the then new parsimonious police re-organisation scheme would admit.

The assistant collector was encamped in the village below, and I was to remain a few days with him to combine business with snipe shooting. Mr. Platt

(as I shall call him) had been three or four years in charge of these same districts. Officials were not pitchforked about the Presidency in those good old days as they are now. An Assistant Collector and Magistrate had time thoroughly to know the people and to be known by them; whereas nowadays it is "*aj álé, oodya gélé, àsa chúlalé*" (come to-day, gone to-morrow, so it goes on).

Mr. Platt had often spoken to me of the village of Narrayengaum as an exceptionally good camp, and of Madhowrao, the "Khote," or middleman, as the best specimen of the old-fashioned Brahmin he had ever met. Madhowrao paid us a long visit after dinner, and I found him all that Platt had described—a kindly, courtly native gentleman, of about sixty years of age, above the average height, of spare but still active frame, with the intellectual, well-cut features and the curious green-grey eyes peculiar to the Chitpawan Brahmin.

Platt had previously told me the history of the family, which had received this village in "Khote" tenure about a century before as a reward for great services to the then Peshwa, and had settled down there to reclaim and repopulate it as stipulated in the "Sanad," or deed of grant. Madhowrao's elder and only brother had died a few months before. It had been the boast of the two brothers that no process of the revenue, civil or criminal courts, had ever been sent to Narrayengaum, and that no policeman ever visited it on duty.

But the burden of Madhowrao's lament to us that

night was that all this had changed for the worse since his brother's death. His brother left a son, then about twenty-five years of age, whom we saw, and set down then and there as a most objectionable specimen of the youthful Brahmin of the new school. Madhowrao also had a son of about the same age, whom we did not see. His father was in great trouble about him; he told us that Vinayek had for eight or ten years caused him the greatest anxiety by absenting himself for months together, and wandering about the country as a sort of "Gosai," or religious mendicant; he would suddenly return, and as suddenly disappear.

He had in this way disappeared after a two months' visit in the previous month of July, and Madhowrao was getting very anxious about him. We learnt that since his uncle's death, Vinayek, now known as Vinayek Deo (Deo is a religious affix), had become very intimate with his cousin, and that the two had combined to put pressure on him to consent to a partition or "Wantup" of the village. In short, poor Madhowrao seemed to me to be worried out of his life by his son and nephew. I may mention that—his wife having died some years before—his household was superintended by his widowed sister, a nice-looking old lady, who insisted on our eating some very pungent cakes of her own making. I remember that she bored us a good deal with her reiterated abuse of the missing Vinayek Deo, and it was clear that they were on the worst possible terms.

I must here, for the sake of my story, describe the locality, and I should be tempted, if space permitted, to dwell at some length on the great natural beauties of the spot. The village lay at the head of a gorge or ravine, just below where a stream, of considerable volume even at that season, and a roaring, foaming torrent in the rains, tumbled over a precipice, about two hundred feet high, into a basin it had worn out below—a pool which, like all pools at the foot of waterfalls along the Ghauts, was popularly supposed to be of unfathomable depth, and to be the haunt of a monster alligator. On a rocky ledge near the top of the fall, and almost projecting over it, rose the fantastic outline of the laterite-built village temple, which, with its red-brown walls here and there covered with patches of delicate ferns, stood out in strong relief against the falling water and the brilliant verdure of the hillside. The village nestled under the hill on the left, nearly hidden from view by a dense thicket of bamboos, cocoa-nut trees, and rich, glossy-leaved mangoes. Two houses only stood on the right hand of the stream, that of Madhowrao, nearest the torrent; that of his nephew a hundred yards lower down, each surrounded by groves of the “areca,” or betel-nut palm—“the straightest thing in nature,” some one has called it, and certainly one of the most graceful of all our Indian palms. In the fair season it was an easy matter to cross the torrent-bed from stone to stone. In the monsoon, or rainy season, the only means of getting from the village to the Khote’s houses was by a sort of suspension



NARRAYEN-GAUM.

[To face p. 6.]

bridge of bamboos. At that season, of course, the roar of the waterfall drowned every other noise in the village. Below the village the gorge spread out on either side into a sheet of rice fields, while the hillsides were terraced out with infinite labour into narrow plots for the growth of coarser grains. A fairer scene, a more picturesque spot, it is impossible to conceive. I left it with regret, little thinking that I should have to visit it again in a few months to inquire into the horrible murder of Vinayek Deo, alleged to have been committed by our respected old friends, his father Madhowrao and his old aunt.

For some time I heard nothing from or about the village. At last the chief constable, or "Foujdar," as he was termed in those days, reported that Madhowrao, having failed to trace his son, had applied to him for aid, and offered a small reward for intelligence of him. A notice, with a description of Vinayek Deo, was accordingly sent to neighbouring districts, and circulated throughout my own charge, but with no result.

Some months passed by, and I was at the headquarters station for the monsoon with all the other district officers, when it was reported by the same Foujdar that he had received by post an anonymous letter declaring, in the most circumstantial manner, that Vinayek Deo had been strangled in the dead of the night by his old father and aunt, and that, unable to dispose of or carry the body themselves, they had employed their two farm-servants, Baloo and Bapoo, to carry it to the torrent

and cast it into the deep pool, where it would doubtless be discovered, if the "mugger" (alligator) had not eaten it!

The Foujdar went on to say that he had at once proceeded to the village, had interrogated Baloo and Bapoo, who confessed to having been called up by Madhowra, in the middle of a tempestuous night in the previous July, that they were shown Vinayek Deo lying dead, with protruding tongue and eyes, and a cord round his neck, that Madhowrao and the old woman besought them to throw the corpse into the pool close by, and that after stripping off the clothes, which Madhowrao rolled up and gave to the old woman—his sister—they tied a heavy stone round it and hurled the body into the water.

On this the Foujdar had, of course, apprehended Madhowrao, his sister, and the two servants, had the house searched, and found a bundle of clothing and a pair of sandals hidden away, and was engaged in dragging the pool as well as he could. "The Sahib might rely upon his energy and intelligence, but it would be a great satisfaction if the Sahib could come down himself."

Of course the Sahib went down, and never shall I forget what an awful journey I had! It was raining from twelve to eighteen inches a day; every small watercourse was a raging torrent, and the path in the lower lands, leading along narrow rice bunds, afforded scarcely any footing for my unhappy "tat" (pony). However, everything has an end, and after two long weary days' marching I reached Narrayen-

gaum, and put up in the only shelter there was—an outhouse at Madhowrao's farm.

The Foujdar then produced a bundle full of bones he had just fished up from the pool, which we sealed up and sent off for examination by the Civil Surgeon, and then the prisoners were brought before me. I was shocked beyond measure at the utter collapse of Madhowrao. He only moaned, and seemed hardly able to articulate, and his old sister kept going from one fit of hysterics into another. Having had the statements of Baloo and Bapoo previously read to me by the Foujdar, I had each of these gentlemen brought into me separately, and his handcuffs removed. Then, ordering the police to stay outside, I made each of them tell his own tale in his own way, and each of them repeated in substance what I have above related. I found it impossible to shake them in any way—"they had seen their old master in sore trouble; he had asked them to help in getting rid of the body, and they naturally obeyed him; they knew nothing more; they had never told any one what had happened, and could not understand how it became known; they hoped the Sirkar would be merciful, and pardon them for telling the truth," and so on. The men were ordinary Kunbis (cultivators), of average intelligence, but they seemed to me rather to overdo their feelings of gratitude and devotion to Madhowrao. They repeated over and over the same story in nearly the same words. Their evidence, in a word, was too good, and I made up my mind at once that they were lying.

Duty, however, required me to take the case back with me to the Assistant, my old friend Platt. He too questioned the would-be approvers, failed to shake their evidence, and took them to the Magistrate, one of the most experienced officials then in India. Here again they related their story without deviating a hair's breadth. Yet the Magistrate and Platt were as convinced as I was that they were repeating a well-taught lesson !

At the Magistrate's desire, but very much against my own inclination, I transferred the Foujdar, and the police who had been with him at the inquiry, to other posts. The Magistrate took fresh steps to trace Vinayek Deo in the surrounding districts, while the prisoners were remanded from time to time for further investigation.

In due course the Civil Surgeon deposed that the bones found were those of a bullock, and it further transpired that the bundle of clothes (which undoubtedly had belonged to Vinayek Deo) were not found in any way concealed in Madhowrao's house—they were simply laid in his own chest with his own clothes. We had many interviews with Madhowrao, who now constantly repeated, "Jiwant hai, pun mee mèlya-shiwai nahi yènar" (He is alive, but he won't come till I am dead). A month or two passed, when the transferred Foujdar applied for three months' leave on medical certificate, his health having completely broken down (as he alleged) in consequence of his disgrace. With the Magistrate's consent I let him go, and I understood he had gone to a relative in Bombay.

The case by this time was practically out of my hands, and was borne on the monthly register of cases pending before Mr. Platt. These were the days of the old "Sudder Adawlut," now the High Court of Judicature, which was then famed for penning most offensive precepts and comments on the work of the Judges and Magistrates. This intelligent body soon noticed Mr. Platt's delay in disposing of the Narayengaum murder case, and called for and received explanations which only made them more angry. Detailed reports were then called for, and the Magistrate was told that the Court were of opinion that, notwithstanding there was no *corpus delicti*, there was still ample evidence for the committal of the prisoners. A fierce paper war with the District Magistrate then ensued, and so time slipped on till November, when Platt was again on tour, leaving the four accused in the lock-up at headquarters. At last the Magistrate forwarded to him a peremptory order from the Sudder Court that he should forthwith commit the Narayengaum murder case to the sessions, and report within fifteen days that he had done so.

What followed is best told in the following characteristic epistle, which I shortly after received from Platt :—

"You will be pining to hear from me the full details of the Narayengaum murder case. I only wish you had been with me at the end, and could have seen how heavily I scored against those judicial fossils in Bombay.

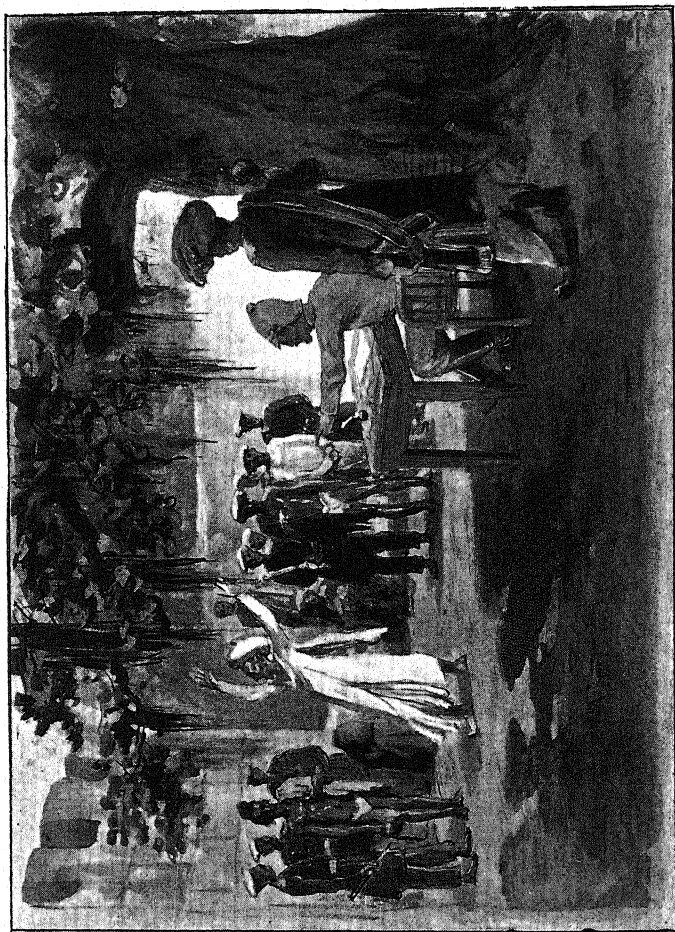
"Well, when I received their idiotic and, as I think, illegal order to commit, I ordered Madhowrao and Co. to be sent down

to Viziadroog to meet me on Monday the 1st inst. On the previous evening I was pitched at Pimpulgaum, that little village on the opposite side of the creek—you know the place, close to the track that comes down from Rajapoor beyond—when a couple of policemen with a prisoner arrived, and the naik (corporal) in a great state of excitement handed me a packet with “Zaroor-zaroor” (urgent, urgent) written all over it. It was from your old Foujdar on leave, telling me that he sent the missing Vinayek Deo, whom he had followed up and caught far away in the Nizam’s territory! I never felt more like licking a man in my life than when I saw the venomous young reptile and remembered all poor Madhowrao had suffered.

“To cut a long story short, I took him over to Viziadroog in my boat next morning, warning the police not to say who he was, and immediately on arrival had up the four prisoners—Madhowrao, his sister, and the two approvers. You can picture the scene to yourself. The Court was held as usual under that big banian tree in the fort, and I began by telling Madhowrao that I had now received final orders to commit the case to the sessions, but that I myself was firmly convinced of his innocence, and believed that Vinayek Deo was alive, and would sooner or later turn up.

“You will understand that this little harangue was by way of preparing Madhowrao. He, poor fellow, only said, as he always had, ‘He *is* alive, but he has killed me.’ The old lady squatted speechless, with her saree (dress) covering her face, and those two hounds, Baloo and Bapoo, retained their usual brutally stolid demeanour. I beckoned to the police behind the prisoners, and Vinayek Deo was brought almost noiselessly up, when I said to Madhowrao, ‘God is great! Look behind you, Baba!’ He turned, saw his son, and fell flat on his face insensible. The old lady went off into screeching hysterics, but the two others, so far as I noticed, never moved a muscle of their countenances. We had the greatest difficulty in reviving poor old Madhowrao; in fact, I at one time feared he was a dead man. He was better, however, in the afternoon, though terribly weak, and I was able to resume proceedings with Vinayek Deo as prisoner No. 1, Baloo No. 2, and Bapo No. 3.

“Vinayek Deo made a clean breast of it, confessing that he and that evil-visaged cousin whom we saw at Narrayengaum last



THE IDENTIFICATION IN THE FOINT.

[To face p. 12.

year concocted the plot between them. Vinayek Deo was to disappear suddenly, and make his way in disguise to the Moglai (Nizam's dominion), and after a sufficient interval the cousin Luxmanrao was to get an anonymous petition sent in denouncing Madhowrao and the old lady. Baloo and Baboo were carefully coached up as to their story, and told not to vary it by a word, and were promised some land rent free when Madhowrao was disposed of. A more fiendish conspiracy never entered a Brahmin's brain! You will have heard that I had the cousin arrested, and I have just committed the lot to the sessions on a charge of conspiracy, but I fear the cousin Luxmanrao will get off, for there is nothing but the confessions of the other three against him.

"The Magistrate writes me that on his return to the Sudder's precept he gave them a lecture, which they will hardly venture to publish in their monthly proceedings. He adds that he was sorry he could not send on my report, as I asked him to do; it was really 'too cheeky'! You must 'keep very kind' on your Foujdar. God knows what would have been the end but for his pluck and intelligence!"

The end of the case was that Vinayek Deo was sentenced to seven years' and Baloo and Bapoo to three years' each hard labour, while the cousin was acquitted. Madhowrao and the old lady quite got over it, and lived for some years afterwards. The cousin, however, went on a pilgrimage to Benares and died there, so Madhowrao had peace for the last few years of his life. I did "keep kindness" on the Foujdar. He was rapidly promoted, and died in harness as a police inspector. He always declared that when he went on leave he had no clue whatever, but he was deeply impressed by Madhowrao's demeanour, and very angry at having been disgraced, and was determined to find Vinayek Deo if he was alive, or never return to service again. He first

picked up a thread of intelligence at that sink of iniquity, Pandharpur, and his subsequent adventures in pursuit of the missing man would make a capital story in themselves.

In the present day, with improved means of communication by telegraph and otherwise, Vinayek Deo would probably have been found in a few weeks, and the plot would not have matured. Even if it had, under the existing Codes of Procedure, Madhowrao's suspense would not have been prolonged; the Magistrate would doubtless have committed the case for trial, but at the sessions the Judge would have certainly relied greatly upon the assessors' appreciation of the evidence of the two approvers and the surrounding circumstances, and Madhowrao would certainly have been acquitted, though he would have remained under a cloud till his rascally son turned up.

I was at great pains to satisfy myself whether Vinayek Deo's object really was to get his father convicted of his own murder. I hoped that his vindictiveness only went as far as seeking to involve his father in disgrace and suffering; but subsequent interviews with Vinayek Deo in gaol left me no room for doubt. The man himself was actually rather proud of his performance, and evidently enjoyed relating how the plot was hatched and carried out. He seemed to me positively to exult in all his father had suffered, and only to regret that his cousin had not shared his own fate.

As to the motives of the two servants, Baloo and Bapoo, I could never discover that they had any

beyond those above-stated ; they were common labourers, possessed of no land of their own, and they firmly believed that Vinayek Deo and his cousin would reward them if they stuck to their story. They admitted that they bore no ill-will towards Madhowrao, in whose house they had lived for years, and who, as well as his old sister, had always treated them well. They were very little higher than animals as to intelligence, but had not the gratitude that animals show to those who feed them.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT MILITARY PENSION FRAUDS.—

TANNAK : THE DUMMY PENSIONER.

PART I.

IN the true history of "The Would-be Parricide" I sketched the progress of a conspiracy, the first step in which was an anonymous petition of the false and more common type. I now follow it up by an account of another, but a true anonymous letter, which in a great measure led to the disclosure of an organised system of fraud extending over many years.

It is necessary for the purposes of my narrative that I should accurately describe the localities. I might, without risk of injuring the feelings of any one, even give the real names of the actors in the drama, for nearly thirty-five years have passed away, and, with one exception, every one concerned has long left India and been gathered to his fathers; the record, however, no doubt remains preserved in the archives of the Military Department.

My own knowledge of the case is derived from the perusal of a copy of the proceedings of a Military Court of Inquiry at the time, and from notes furnished to me

since by the chief person connected with the affair, whose permission I have obtained to make use of them. During the early stages I was, as the Police Officer of the district, necessarily cognisant of what was going on, but I had nothing officially to do with the inquiry, beyond furnishing a couple of the most intelligent and reliable of my constables to aid the Assistant Magistrate—men who, I am glad to remember, thoroughly justified my selection, and ultimately rose to posts of (to them) considerable emolument in the Bombay City Police.

In the days I speak of, the South Konkan, which properly includes the two “zillahs,” or districts, of Kolaba and Rutnagherry, was the favourite recruiting-ground of the Bombay Army. The ranks were then filled with sturdy Mahrattas, descendants of Sivaji’s invincible “Hedkaris,” inhabiting the spurs and valleys below the great Syhadri range of mountains. Every regiment also contained many outcast mhars from the same region, excellent soldiers, many of whom rose to high rank.

All this, I am told, has now been changed ; recruiting parties, though still sent into the district, find great difficulty in enlisting even the small proportion of undersized men that fastidious commissioned officers will now admit into their battalions. Eighty-two Bombay cotton mills and other factories and the railways have absorbed all the spare labour the Konkan can provide, and mhars and low castes fill the scavenger corps of the Bombay Health Department. Still, there must be thousands of military

pensioners spread over this country, whose well-being should be the care of a humane Government; and if anything that appears in this paper draws the attention of authority to their condition, it will not have been penned in vain.

Nearly in the centre of this South Konkan, six miles from the sea-board and the little fair-season port of Hurnee, is the old cantonment of Dapoolie, formerly the chief of many small military posts dotted along the coast after our subjugation of the country between 1817 and 1819. Dapoolie survived them all, being selected, by reason of its position, as the headquarters of the Native Veteran Battalion, to which were drafted all invalided sepoys still capable of some light duty, but not yet entitled to full pension.

Dapoolie thus naturally became the headquarters also of the Pension Pay Department—a department of considerable importance even now, seeing that it pays away some six lakhs per annum, and in the days of which I speak swallowed up nearly the whole land revenue of the Rutnaghiri Zillah. The Paymaster, provided with a strong establishment of Purbhus, or clerks, resided here, and twice during the fair season was expected to visit the principal towns accessible from the sea-board, and at each of them to pay the pensioners in the neighbourhood, previously summoned for the purpose. At Dapoolie itself he made quarterly payments, and the majority of the pensioners were settled within fairly easy reach of the cantonment. The system had been in force for

nearly twenty years, during most of which time the same officer had held the post of paymaster.

Instances of personating deceased pensioners had occasionally but rarely cropped up, and on the whole the military authorities had no reason to doubt that all was going well. Towards the end of the "fifties," the Native Veteran Battalion, or the "Guttram Phaltan," as natives called it, was abolished, having, I may mention, done very useful service during the Mutiny years, 1857 to 1859, when even the decrepit military pensioners joined them in taking all the Treasury and other stationary guards throughout the Konkan.

The abolition of the cantonment had been determined upon, and specific orders were expected every month. In the interim the Bazaar-master (an old European Officer of the battalion) remained in charge of the cantonment.

It was at this time that my friend, whom I shall call Colt, joined the district as Assistant Collector and Magistrate in charge of the northern "talookas," or sub-districts, wherein Dapoolie is situate. Colt was an officer of some few years' standing, endowed with remarkable energy; and though in no sense of the word a good Mahratti or Guzerati scholar, yet possessed of an unusual practical knowledge of both those vernaculars, especially of Mahratti, which he wrote and read easily, and spoke like a native. He was thus quite independent of his sheristedar (secretary) and karkoons (clerks); always opened and read his own post, and often wrote his own orders before handing his correspondence to his office.

Many a mile have we two jogged along the tracks in that part of the country. The only five miles of made road in the district at that time was from Dapoolie to Hurnee, and one could hardly do more than six miles an hour. Colt stopped and talked to every knot of wayfarers we caught up; as I subsequently remembered, was particularly conversational with those who seemed to be pensioned sepoys on their way to the quarterly payment. Their story was always much to the same effect; "It is a good and kind Sirkar (Government). Our pensions are liberal, and we should be content, but the sowkar (money-lender) eats us up, and the Sirkar is blind and helpless." On one occasion I was staying with Colt in the Assistant Collector's picturesque bungalow at Hurnee; there are, by the way, few more beautiful views than that from the spacious verandah. The post was brought up, and Colt, in his armchair, proceeded to open the various packets, sorting and noting on them from time to time. "Hullo," he said suddenly, "here's an anonymous petition saying that a pensioned Jemedar died seven years ago, and that his pension is still drawn by the village headman."

We discussed a little what ought to be done with it, and finally the sheristedar (head clerk) was sent for. He was not shown the petition, but simply asked what was the usual practice in regard to petitions about military pensions, and promptly replied that they should be sent with an endorsement in English by the Saheb to the Paymaster Saheb for the latter's disposal.

Colt seemed to acquiesce, and I quite understood that he had passed on the petition to Dapoolie in accordance with the usual routine.

More than a year passed, and Colt, whose children were ailing, obtained permission to pass the monsoon or rainy months at Dapoolie, instead of at Rutnagiri, the civil headquarters at which I, in common with all other civil officers, was doomed to stay. An old friend of Colt's, the Medical Superintendent of vaccination, accompanied him, and they took a house together. About the middle of the rainy season, Colt wrote to me privately to send him the two most reliable and intelligent men under me, and to let it seem as if the order originated from myself, and was merely a transfer to and from his own usual police guard. At the same time the Magistrate took an opportunity privately of requesting me to give Colt any aid he might ask for, but to keep my own counsel, as there was something serious afoot. Of course I complied, and for two or three months more daily looked out for some stirring news from Dapoolie to relieve the horrible monotony of our daily life.

At last, one evening late in October, while "the station" was assembled and trying to kill time at the daily croquet squabble, the bells of a "dak" runner were heard approaching—obviously an "Ixprèsh," for the regular post was long in. Fearing it might be news of a murder or dacoity, I rushed off to the post-office and found one much-sealed packet addressed in Colt's hand to the

Magistrate, who soon sent for me to request me to transfer a dozen police to Hurnee to obey Colt's orders. He then showed me that officer's confidential despatch, and I made a copy of it for him, and also of a letter which he then and there wrote to the Chief Secretary to Government, enclosing the former, suggesting that a military court of inquiry should assemble at Dapoolie as soon as the "coast opened" for native craft, and that Colt should be nominated to prosecute.

Colt's report was most sensational. It appeared that for nearly two years he had been secretly collecting evidence which showed that, not only had the pensions of deceased pensioners been drawn after their deaths, but that there was an organised conspiracy between "scwkars," or money-lenders, on the one hand, and the Purbhu clerks of the Pension Pay Office on the other, by which pensioned sepoy, and the pensioned families of sepoy, perished in service, had been systematically robbed of their pensions for a long series of years. The descriptive rolls of the unfortunates—without which they could not claim payment—were pledged wholesale to money-lenders, who, with the connivance of the clerks, sent up dummies to personate the pensioners and draw their pay, which was every evening brought to the head clerk's office, and there distributed among the sowkars, who let their miserable victims have a few rupees to carry on with till the next pay day.

Colt had actually arrested two of these dummies

with many pensioners' rolls and the full pensions on their persons: he had also seized the account-books for two years of the leading sowkars for three miles round, and found abundant corroborative evidence in them. He had removed the three personating dummies to Hurnee in close custody, and they had already made a clean breast of it, and disclosed ramifications of the plot of the extent of which he himself was not previously aware. Free pardon to these personators, and the prompt suspension from office of the entire military Pension Pay Establishment, was earnestly solicited.

The Magistrate felt, and said, that the arrest and removal of the personators from the limits of the Cantonment without the least communication with the Bazaar-master, as also the seizure of the sowkar's books, might be regarded by higher authorities as a very irregular, high-handed, if not illegal proceeding. On the other hand, it was not to be forgotten that for some few years the military authority in the cantonment of Dapoolie had been notoriously lax, and was certainly ill-defined, and he believed Colt would be able to justify whatever irregularities he might have committed. He would therefore strenuously support him at every point. The Government in the Secret Department (Sir Henry Anderson being Secretary) supported him also, and the military authorities were invited to convene a Court of Inquiry and to suspend the Pay Establishment; pensioners to be paid in the interval by civil agency.

After weeks of harassing delay, which Colt utilised in collecting and arranging his evidence, and the pay clerks devoted to sending daily scurrilous memorials and petitions, anonymous and otherwise, to Government, a "General Order" appeared appointing a Court of Inquiry to assemble at Dapoolie to conduct an investigation into matters which would there be officially communicated to them. The Military Department "saw no present reason for suspending the pension pay subordinates!" The Civil Government authorised a free pardon to the personators. Of the three officers nominated to the Court, the Président was at Belgaum, another member in Guzerat, and the third at Ahmednugger, and it was nearly Christmas before the Court could assemble. The details of their proceedings and other explanatory matter must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT MILITARY PENSION FRAUDS—*continued.*

PART II.

LONG before the military court of inquiry could assemble at Dapoolie I had an opportunity of seeing my friend Colt, and hearing from his own mouth, and from his friend the vaccinating Doctor, the details of the grand *coup* by which the conspiracy had been at last exploded.

I was surprised to learn that Colt had not even then taken any steps towards ascertaining the truth of the anonymous letter (to which I have before referred) alleging the fraudulent drawing of a deceased pensioner's pay: he proposed to reserve this particular case for the Court. A less wary man would have worked upon this information from the outset, and thereby, as I easily perceived afterwards, have put the conspirators on their guard.

"Had I," said Colt, "followed the regular routine and sent the petition to the pension paymaster for disposal, it would probably have been so arranged that proof of the fraud would have been difficult—worse still, the office might have brought the case

forward as a discovery by themselves, and made capital out of it before the Court. If, on the other hand, I, as Magistrate, had instituted an independent inquiry, the office would have taken alarm, and guessed that I suspected them generally, and would have had ample time and opportunity to 'square' or warn every one all round. It was wiser to let them remain undisturbed in blissful ignorance, impressed with the belief that the new Assistant Collector took no more interest than his predecessors in pensioners or their affairs. It doesn't do to rush your fence, old fellow! So I've left that particular case untouched, and have all this time been picking up what information I could get on other matters more nearly concerning living pensioners and their wrongs. The dead man's case, if it turns out true (as I believe it will), will be a *bonne bouche* for the Court to start upon, and will strengthen my position before them at the outset."

Colt had derived most of his information from two persons to whom I should certainly never have resorted myself: a retired European Conductor of the Ordnance Department, and a young Parsee shop-keeper—about the last people I should have expected to find versed in Hindoo life, or to be able or willing to impart information worth having. Mr. Daniel Monk, the retired Conductor aforesaid, had been for some years settled in a small village a few miles from Dapoolie, where he had leased a few acres of rough land, built himself a small hut, and gone in for coffee growing, more for amusement than with a view to

profit. He lived a most secluded life, with one old Mahommedan who had been a quarter of a century in his service.

Domestic trouble in earlier days was supposed to have driven him to the life of a recluse: but, though I knew him as well as any one in those parts, I could never induce him to speak of, or even to refer to, the past.

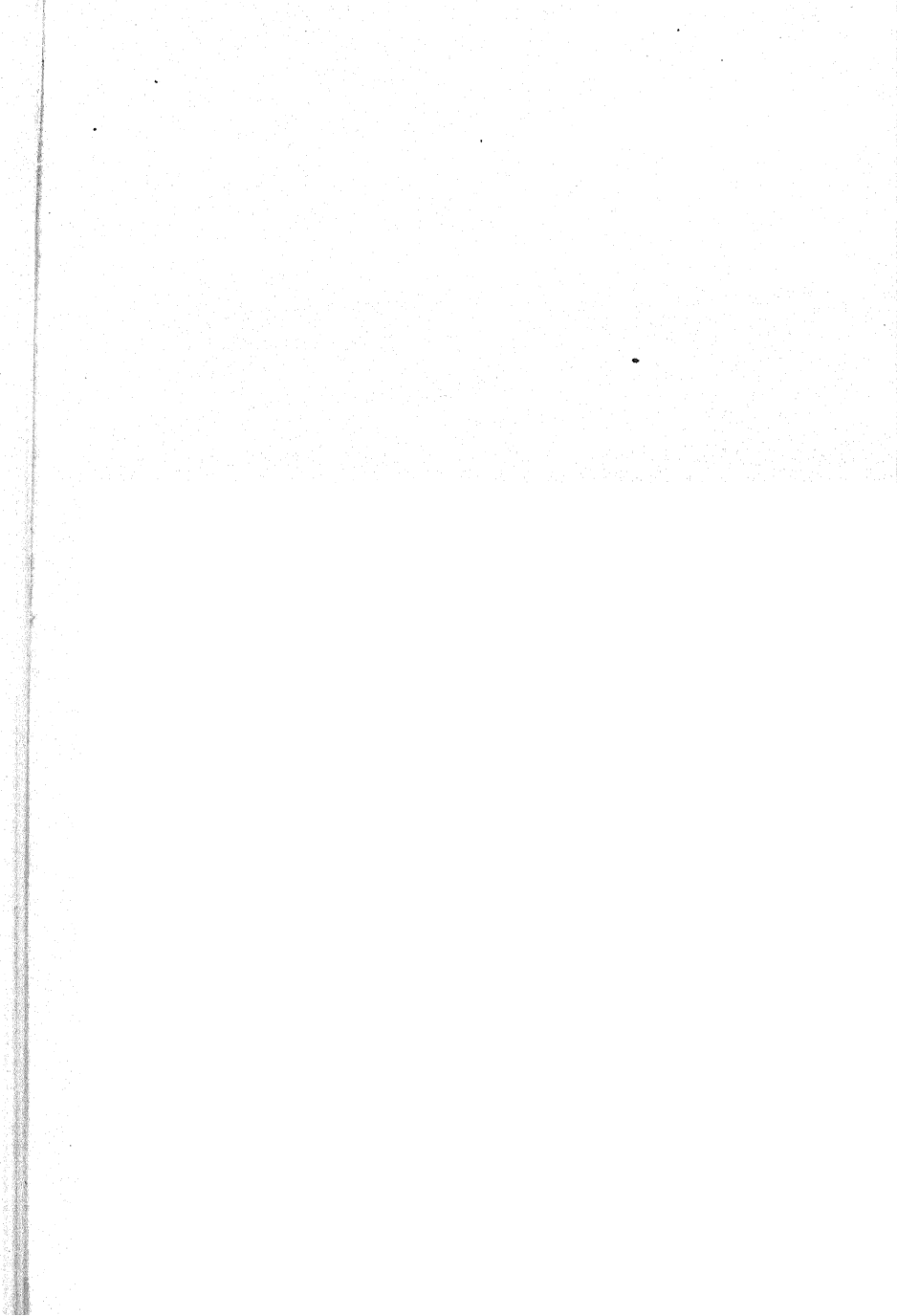
He rarely left the village; he hardly set foot outside his garden more than twice a year, when he had to get a life certificate to enable him to draw his small annuity: but he was much visited by all classes of natives, who held him in high respect for his blameless life, and perhaps entertained some superstitious regard for him because of his fakir-like habits. Somehow or other, he had taught himself enough Mahratti to be able to read native newspapers, but he took no interest whatever in the current events that interest Europeans; he was, above all, a peacemaker, and many a foolish quarrel was referred to him and settled at his little hut, where he might be seen any day from the road, seated in his verandah or pottering about among his coffee trees. A grand old fellow, past sixty years of age when I knew him, six feet two in height, and as straight as a dart, invariably clad in a loose striped cotton blouse, pyjamas, native sandals, and no stockings.

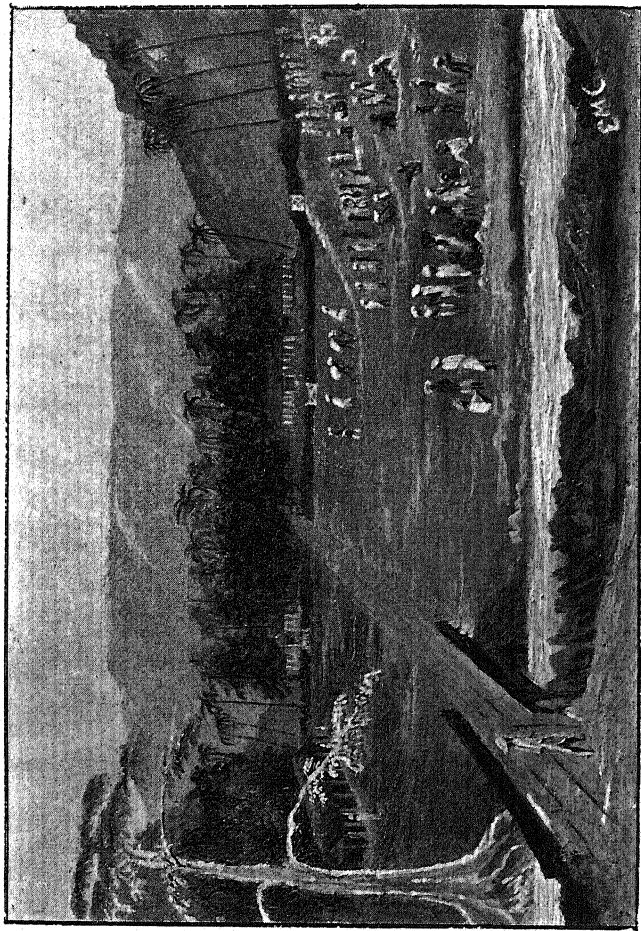
I have been led to describe him, because he subsequently played an important part in another matter. "But that's another story," as Kipling says! Living this life, he had come to know many of the native

pensioners; and his old servant—who, I verily believe, thought he was a saint—brought many of them to him with their troubles.

Fulloo was the son of an old Parsee shopkeeper, who supplied the few European officers in Dapoolie with "Europe stores," and the richer native pensioners with British brandies and other poisons. A very intelligent young fellow of twenty-five was Fulloo, extremely energetic and pushing—as all his people are—and very popular with European and native alike. I am much afraid, however, that Colt would have got very little assistance out of Fulloo, if Fulloo's bibulous customers among the pensioners had paid their little accounts regularly: but the conspirators who robbed them, in their greed left the men barely sufficient to live upon, and were foolish enough not to let Fulloo's bills be regarded as a first claim on their pensions. So Fulloo naturally hated the usurers and the office purbhush (clerks), and was ready enough to impart all he knew—and perhaps a little more—to Colt, to whom, however, he subsequently proved a most valuable agent.

I must here briefly describe, for the information of uninitiated readers, the process of pension payment as it then existed and probably still exists. It was simplicity itself. On being admitted to pension, each man or woman was carefully examined, and a descriptive roll drawn up containing minute details as to age, height, any distinctive marks or scars, general appearance, and so forth. A copy of this document, showing the monthly amount payable, and





DAPOOLIE: PAYING THE PENSIONERS.

[To face p. 29.]

where payable, was then handed to the pensioner in a neat tin case, with instructions to present it each quarter to the Pension Paymaster. In his office it ought to have remained for a day at most for comparison with the register, then the pensioner's name was called out, and on his answering to it the Pension Paymaster was bound to compare the claimant with his descriptive roll, and then to pay him the quarter's pension in arrears, endorsing on the back of the roll the date and amount paid; the roll was then returned to the pensioner. It was expressly forbidden by general orders that the pensioner should transfer, or by sale or mortgage, part with his descriptive roll. The roll of a deceased pensioner was, or should have been, returned by the village officers to the Pension Pay Office with a report of the death. Nothing could be simpler, nothing could be more perfect as a system, to secure the pensioner getting his pension himself, or to protect the Government against fraud, *provided* the Pension Paymaster rigorously adhered to his orders, and did what he certified on honour every quarter he had done, viz. : *compared each pensioner with his descriptive roll at the time of payment.*

But this comparison was a tedious and troublesome business, and the certificate "on honour" came to be regarded as a form. From a comparison of only a percentage, it at last became the rule to compare none of the pensioners with their rolls; and a large majority of the pensioners, ignorant and improvident as they mostly are, habitually pledged

their rolls with the money-lenders for cash advances. The pensioner, at any rate, could not draw his pension without producing his roll, and it was not given to him till the sowkar or usurer, had got a fresh bond out of him up to date. Even then the sowkar usually accompanied his client to the Pay Office, and sat outside—armed with a decree of attachment, in most cases—till the victim came out with his roll and money.

But there were many usurers who would not even trust their clients so far as this, but refused to let the rolls pass again into the hands of their pensioner debtors. Thus a system of dummy pensioners grew up with the connivance of the clerks of the Pay Office, who, of course, were regularly remunerated by the usurers, or not unfrequently had shares in the loans. The usurers then privately handed over their clients' rolls to the clerks, and on an appointed day dummies deputed by the usurers went up, answered to the clients' names, drew the money, received the rolls, and handed the whole (money and rolls) to the usurer at the end of the day's work. It may easily be conceived how completely an indebted pensioner was at the mercy of his creditor, how great was the facility and temptation to the office clerks in the case of deceased pensioners.

Having mastered the outlines of the nefarious conspiracy, Colt's main object was to get at the dummies, to catch them in the very act, with pensions and descriptive rolls on their persons. It was with this object that he settled himself down at

Dapoolie in the monsoon with his friend the doctor, in a bungalow, only separated from the office and residence of the paymaster by a public road; these houses, like all the officers' houses in the station, stood round the edge of and faced the little parade-ground. The brook "Jog" ran behind them, so that persons with information had easy access along its rocky bank to Colt's office without being seen by the assembled pensioners and usurers, or by the clerks in the Pay Office.

About a hundred yards off, on the parade-ground, stood the old quarter-guard, where the treasure needed for payment was kept. From it every morning a little procession of clerks, with two or three pensioners carrying bags of money, wended its way to the Pay Office, and from the office a similar little procession returned every evening with the unexpended balance. Colt soon learnt that the principal dummy was one Tannak, and that he was commonly employed to carry the treasure to and fro. It was some weeks, however, before reliable information was brought by Fulloo that certain large pensions were to be drawn by him.

At last one evening Fulloo rushed in from the brook, and reported that Tannak had drawn three heavy pensions, and that another dummy had drawn others, and that they probably had both the cash and descriptive rolls on them. Colt and the doctor had just time to issue certain orders to his own police and to ensconce themselves behind the garden hedge, when the little procession emerged from the Pay

Office, Tannak leading, loaded with one bag of coin, a pensioner carrying another, the treasurer and another clerk and a peon bringing up the rear. Allowing them just time to enter the quarter-guard, Colt and the doctor raced to the door, entered and shut it, and Colt, turning to Tannak, said, "Tannak, I take you prisoner! You have just drawn the pensions of Subedar-Major Ramnàk, Jemedar Babaji, and Rowji Naique, and you have the money and the descriptive rolls in your waist-cloth!"

Without a word, but in abject terror, Tannak produced what he was taxed with, saying, "The sowkars and the clerks have taught me." A similar formality with similar results was gone through with the pensioner dummy, who had two pensions and rolls on his person. Not a word was said to the clerks, who were speechless with fright. The two prisoners were at once escorted by Colt and the doctor to the limits of the cantonment, and handed over to Colt's own police guard, which he had ordered out for the purpose, who conveyed them in a cart to the lock-up at Hurnee. Colt then went to five or six usurers' houses in small villages adjoining the camp and secured their account-books, which he at once took off to Hurnee for minute examination. It was certainly very neatly managed.

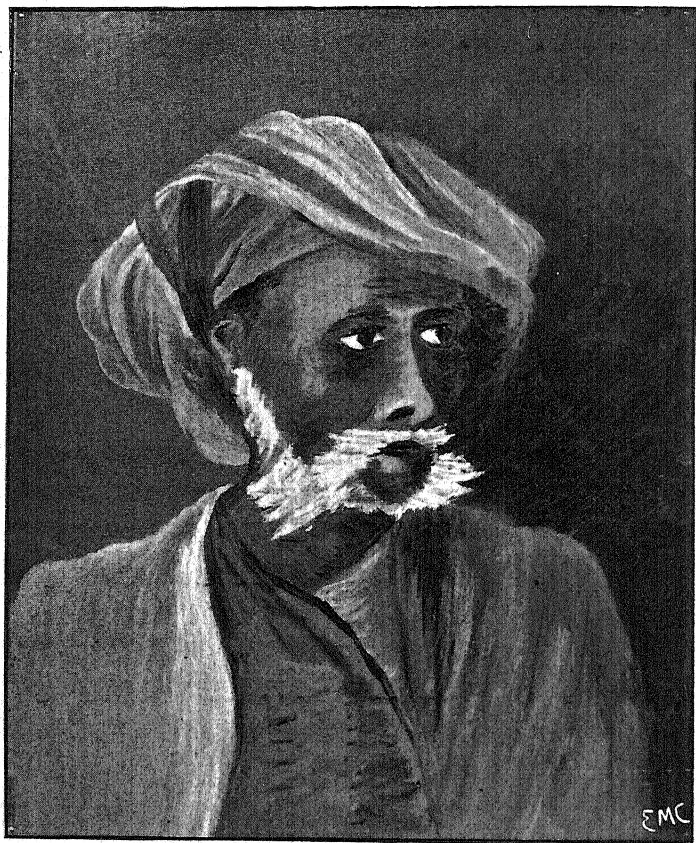
The two dummies were, of course, set at liberty directly Colt received Government sanction to their being made approvers. Of the old fellow arrested with Tannak, and three other pensioners similarly employed from time to time, who subsequently gave

evidence before the Court of Inquiry, it is unnecessary to speak further ; but Tannak merits special description.

Tannak was the son of an old Subedar-Major, who had distinguished himself at the brilliant little battle of Koregaum, and in his old age had settled down at Dapoolie with a special pension. There, in the Mhars' quarter, he built himself a good stone house, buying the occupancy right of a few acres of good land in the vicinity. He brought up his son for the army, and Tannak was duly drilled in the "juvenile squad" up to the age of sixteen, when he so lamed himself in an accident that he could not be enlisted, and after his father's death he had to live as best he could on the family acres. Needless to say, they were soon mortgaged to a usurer in the neighbourhood, who employed him for many years in his transactions with low-caste clients, process serving, executions, and the like.

A fine-looking fellow, well set up and drilled, with a certain military smartness about him, Tannak was unusually intelligent, and, having miraculously abstained from drink, was always trustworthy. So it came to pass when he grew older that he was employed, first by his own usurer, then by others, and finally by usurers and office clerks together, as their most reliable agent at pay time, when he comported himself exactly like a pensioned sepoy, and no ordinary observer would have believed but that he was one. The man was full of humour, and made us almost die of laughing when he related his ex-

periences, and acted over and over again how he used to go up and salute the Paymaster sahib, and say "Hazzur"* to any particular name called out for



TANNAK.

which he was to answer. He rarely drew *more than two* pensions in one day (!), one in the morning and one in the afternoon, lest the sahib might remember him; but on special occasions, such as that on which

* Present.

he was arrested, he had drawn as many as five, making some slight alteration in his dress and voice, and manner generally. The man was, in fact, a born actor, and thoroughly entered into the fun of the thing. He thought it a great compliment that he was always told off to personate the pensioners of high rank, and was quite proud of having drawn the pension and special allowance of Subedar-Major and Sirdar Bahadur Ramnàk for four years without intermission.

He described to us with great drollery the nocturnal meetings of usurers, clerks, and defrauded pensioners. He, canny man, neither gave up cash nor rolls till he had received his own little commission down, ten, fifteen, or even twenty rupees, and then he would try to get better terms for the poor pensioners concerned, and had even threatened to split if enough money were not doled out to each to carry him on to next quarter-day. He was thus a personage of no small importance and influence in the neighbourhood, and did Colt right good service when the Court was sitting. I afterwards employed him regularly as a secret detective. He never failed me, entering *con amore* into any matter confided to him, and on more than one occasion displaying remarkable detective ability.

To proceed with my tale. When Colt knew that the sealed orders for the Court had arrived at Dapoolie, he took Tannak back with him, and, much more confident in his staunchness than I must confess I was, let him run loose, as it were, among his

old associates. Of course, both sowkars and office clerks did their utmost to corrupt him, and to induce him to throw Colt over before the Court. Tannak heard all they had to say, and held out vague hopes, but he never really wavered, and soon furnished Colt with a very valuable piece of information.

The sealed orders came in a large packet addressed "To the President of the Court of Inquiry convened under General order No. so-and-so—to *await arrival*." The post-master, a Purbhu,* ought, of course, to have kept it in his own charge till the President's arrival, but he chose to deliver it to the Bazaar-master, who, very imprudently—not to say improperly—retained it in his drawer, where it was accessible to his clerks, all bosom-friends of the Pay Office clerks. Tannak had not been a week back at Dapoolie when he informed Colt that by some means or other they had got a copy of the orders, and were busily engaged in devising means to meet Colt's charges by influencing certain witnesses whose names were mentioned.

The first arrival was Waller, the junior member of the Court, a very clever young fellow and an excellent Mahratti scholar, who subsequently earned the Victoria Cross, and rose before his death to high position in the Political Department. He had not the remotest idea what the subject for inquiry was, and must have had rather a dull time of it for a week or so; being impecunious after his long journey, as any subaltern would be, he suffered no little dis-

* Purbhus by caste are almost always clerks or writers by profession.

comfort, for he saw the danger and impropriety of borrowing from any one on the spot.

The fact, however, that he *was* very hard up was soon made known in the bazaar, and Fulloo's first important service was to tell Colt that it had been arranged by the conspirators that one of the chief peccant usurers was to call on him one evening and offer him a loan. Colt thereupon wrote him a confidential note warning him of the coming visit, and to be on his guard against all and sundry. The lieutenant in due course wrote that the visit and proposal had duly come off, and that he should report the incident to the President, as he afterwards did.

The President and second member of the Court arrived nearly together, and no time was lost in convening the first meeting. The selection of the Court did great credit to the judgment of Headquarters. The President, a brevet-colonel of no small personal experience of military courts-martial, had a sufficient colloquial knowledge of the vernacular, and though somewhat brusque and hasty, was remarkably quick of observation, and the incarnation of fairness. Captain Bird, the second member, had long been adjutant of his regiment, and was an unusually good Mahratti scholar, besides being an excellent accountant. The members were nearly strangers to each other, and complete strangers to the Pension Paymaster and to Colt.

At the preliminary meeting the President, after a short address, produced the sealed packet of orders;

together with an official letter from the Bazaar-master, reporting that it had been handed to him (the President) by the Bazaar-master. He was about to open it when Colt rose and deferentially requested that it should be first inspected, and its appearance and condition noted. The President could not suppress a look of angry surprise towards Colt, a sort of "you d——d cheeky young civilian" kind of a look, but, controlling himself, said: "Well, gentlemen, there's no harm in *that*." And proceeding to inspect the seals before passing the packet round, ejaculated, "My God! gentlemen, it has been tampered with!" And so it evidently had; by some means—probably with the heated blade of a knife—the seals had been evidently raised, and re-set, *but* the paper under the seals had been cut! Tableau! Marked change in the manner of the President to Colt the prosecutor. Bazaar-master and post-master summoned to the Court. Packet carefully cut open and contents read, while the Court awaited the arrival of the two officials. The junior member produces correspondence with Colt, and reports the loan incident. Rough notes of proceedings drawn up, and the Pension Paymaster summoned to appear forthwith with all his office establishment.

Meantime arrives the post-master, who states that he handed the packet to the Bazaar-master, as being the chief military officer at Dapoolie. The seals were then intact, and did not bear their present appearance. The Bazaar-master, by no means a "master mind," says he received the sealed packet

from the post-master, though it was not addressed to his care ; thought it was all right ; did not think of examining the seals ; put the packet in his office drawer ; does not always lock his office drawer, but is *quite* sure none of *his* establishment would dare to look into it ! President, dismissing him, observes briefly that the facts will be forthwith reported to army headquarters.* Then enters the Pension Paymaster, with some eight or ten clerks and a couple of peons. The contents of the sealed packet are read out to them, and they request that a copy may be supplied to them. The Paymaster is warned to keep his office papers under lock and key, and told that he will be informed when his own presence or that of his clerks is required.

The President, inviting Colt to remain for consultation, declared that he had been much impressed by the incident of the tampered-with seals, and resolved that it be forthwith reported to army headquarters. Colt, meekly observing that he had excellent reasons for suspecting foul play, ventured to put in a letter asking, for reasons stated, that the Court should also recommend the immediate suspension of the entire Pension Pay Establishment, and the transfer of all its records, and, temporarily, of all its duties, to the Court itself. Considerable discussion followed. Colt requested to withdraw, was re-called and informed that the Court had decided to adopt his suggestion and to forward his letter. Adjournment *sine die*.

* N.B.—He was promptly retired from the service.

Such is a brief record of the opening day, and it must be admitted that Colt scored heavily. He never would tell me how much he knew about the sealed packet; but I have a shrewd suspicion that from some place of concealment he actually saw the packet opened by the clerks and certain usurers in secret conclave. If so, he must have possessed amazing self-control not to have seized them in the act.

Almost by return of post the President received authority from army headquarters to suspend every one they named and to carry on the Pension Paymaster's duties pending further orders. Captain Bird accordingly took possession of all the office papers, and from this point the inquiry may be said to have begun. The proceedings were from time to time sensational in the extreme, but the account of them will take another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT MILITARY PENSION FRAUDS—*continued.*

PART III.

AFTER the grand *coup* of the suspension of the entire Pension Pay Department there was a long lull at Dapoolie. The Court of Inquiry were fully occupied in making lists of and taking over the documents in the office, and in mastering the office routine.

My friend Colt went off to the village wherein had resided the deceased pensioner, whose pension—so said the anonymous petition—had been drawn for seven years after his death. The case was a very clear one, and the conspirators, who included the village patel and kulkarni, were duly committed to the sessions ; where, I may mention, they were soon after convicted and sentenced to various long terms of imprisonment. There was no direct evidence, however, to support their story that the clerks in the Pay Office were cognizant of, and shared in, the plunder, but Colt had no doubt this was so.

In due course the Court reassembled, and Colt opened his case, first of all by putting in copies of the proceedings in the deceased pensioner's case just

referred to. He then called his best witness in his strongest case, that of Subedar-Major Sirdar Bahadur Ramnāk Bhāgnāk. I have already mentioned that for specially good service he, from one fund and another, received the (to him) magnificent pension of sixty-seven rupees a month, or rather that, with the connivance of the clerk, my friend Tannak drew it regularly for the sowkars, who doled out to him about ten rupees a month! Three of these cormorants had him down in their books for several hundreds of rupees. Every quarter-day he passed a fresh bond to each creditor, and the whole of the sowkar's dealings with him were found carefully recorded in their accounts. The fine old fellow resided in Dapoolie. His appearance was familiar to every one, and his deeds of prowess were common talk. Almost every day he might be seen wending his way across the "maidan," or parade-ground, within a few yards of the Paymaster's office, clad in a long white gaberdine, or night shirt (as we should rather term it in these degenerate days), a long staff in his hand, his beard and fierce-looking white mustachios curled upward and backward, and always accompanied by a child or two. I remember a sketch of Van Ruith's which might have been his portrait. It was truly remarkable that a personage so notable—the head of the pensioners' list—should not have been treated with special honour and consideration, that his absence at each quarterly payment for more than four years should not have attracted the attention of the paymaster; but so it was!

Mr. Colt assured me that his grand soldier-like appearance, his frank demeanour, and the obvious truthfulness with which he gave his evidence had as powerful an effect on the Court as he himself calculated upon.

Colt then proceeded to call over a hundred witnesses in dozens of similar cases, and could have gone on for months, but that the President declared that the Court was satisfied. A short report of progress was then made to army headquarters, and permission was asked for and obtained for the Court to adjourn to Chiploon, another important paying station. A few more important cases were picked up there, and then the Court returned to Dapoolie, and prepared and sent in a voluminous report. They were promptly instructed to supply the Paymaster and the clerks with a copy of it, and to call upon them for any explanation they might desire to give.

The Paymaster elected to appear personally before the Court; his subordinates promised to submit a joint written defence. In due course the Paymaster appeared, and the pith of his argument was, that in the twenty years he had performed the duties, he had no doubt that laxity had crept in, but that he was confident in the rectitude of his clerks, whom he vehemently declared to be maligned individuals.

Asked by the President if he habitually compared each applicant for payment of his pension with his description roll, he was forced to admit that he had not done so for some years, as his experience was so

great that he was confident he could detect personation at a glance.

Asked how he reconciled it with his duty to sign at the foot of the quarterly list of payments the certificate, "I hereby certify on my honour that at the time of payment I duly compared each pensioner with his descriptive roll," the poor old gentleman said that he had regarded this as a mere form; and he insisted again and again that he never could be deceived, but should instantly detect any personator.

At this moment the President, after consulting with his colleagues, passed a pencilled note over to Colt: "Call Tannak in quietly from behind." Now Tannak was always kept handy at the stable. Colt slipped out and told Tannak to go round and come up to the front door just as he did when drawing pensions. In a few minutes Tannak appeared at the threshold, and, drawing himself up, delivered himself of a military salute, ejaculating, "Saheb! Meri urzee hai" (I have a petition to make).

Quoth the President, "Major, look at that man! Is he a pensioner?"

"Certainly he is," replied the major. "I am quite familiar with his appearance."

"Doubtless you are, sir," drily remarked the President. "This man is Tannak, who has often personated pensioners, and drawn four and five pensions in a single day."

Tableau! in the midst of which the poor old paymaster drifted away, and Tannak, saluting, returned to his stable.

After numerous and at last peremptory messages, the clerks came to the Court with a document purporting to be their defence. It consisted mainly of gross abuse of Colt, the prosecutor, enlarged on a few discrepancies in the evidence, and announced their intention of prosecuting Colt for suborning evidence.

Asked if that was all they had to say, they replied in the affirmative, but expressed a hope that the Court would receive any further statement they might be able to make. The President said that it would take the Court ten days to prepare their report to headquarters, and that they would receive anything tendered on or before the tenth day, when the doors would be closed, and the prosecutor himself would leave the neighbourhood on other urgent duty.

Colt thought he observed the clerks rather prick up their ears at the latter piece of news, and determined not to relax his vigilance in the interim—and he was repaid. The ten days slipped away without a sign from the clerks, and Colt made his arrangements for a long march on the eleventh day. The evening before, he was walking down the bazaar, when he came upon one of the petty sowkars whose books had not been seized at the outset, but who had been casually mentioned in the course of the inquiry. The man was walking briskly and somewhat jauntily along, but on meeting Colt he was visibly disconcerted. Colt could not understand what it meant, and for the time dismissed the matter from his mind. Very early in the morning, however, he was awakened by the Parsi informer Fulloo's voice at his

bedside in the old deserted bungalow in which he slept. "Saheb! Saheb! get up. The clerks have some 'daga' (treachery) afoot; they've had a meeting with Dewchund Shroff." Now Dewchund was the very man Colt had met and disconcerted on the previous evening!

After some palaver with Fulloo, Colt decided only to pretend to go, and to make his way back to Dapoolie by eleven o'clock. Accordingly "chota hazri" (early breakfast) was taken as usual, and the remaining kit sent off, and about seven o'clock Colt cantered round the "maidan" and took a cordial farewell of the members of the Court, and then started ostensibly on the march. Four or five miles off he turned back, and, knowing the ground well, made his way round by a "nullah" to the back of his old house, stabled his "tat," and from a clump of bushes watched the entrance to the court's office.

About half-past ten he perceived a procession of spotlessly-dressed clerks filing into the court's compound or garden; and shortly afterwards, being sure that they were before the Court, he walked quietly down, and entering by a side gate Colt was in the court-room before the clerks (who were seated in a semicircle with their backs to him) could perceive him.

"Hullo!" shouted the President. "What—not gone yet?"

"No," said Colt quietly. "I thought I'd just see it out to-day."

"Well, Mr. Prosecutor," quoth the President, "your

presence is most opportune, for the accused have just brought us a letter which they say contains matter of serious import to them, and we may as well go into it at once." The discomfiture of the clerks, Colt told me, was ludicrous—they would have given anything to have got the letter back, but the President had it, opened it, and at once began to read it.

Now, one of the class of cases Colt had produced related to the swindling of female pensioners who received some small quarterly allowance from the State because their husbands had been killed in action, or for some kindred reason. They too had pledged their descriptive rolls with sowkars, and many of them had never received an anna for years. One Cassee, for instance, entitled to two rupees a month, or six rupees per quarter, had left her roll with a leading sowcar, and gone to service in Poona with the family of the Bazaar-master there. For seven years or more she had never left Poona, and Colt proved it, and showed that her pension had all the time been drawn in Dapoolie by sowcars. It was a strong case, and one that had particularly aroused the indignation of the Court at the time.

The clerks' petition related to this case. They said that they had just accidentally discovered a most important piece of evidence, which would at once break down this case, and the Court would then easily see how Mr. Colt must have fabricated most of the other evidence against them. The evidence lay in the testimony of one Dewchund Shroff, who had

dealings with Cassee, and would produce his books, to show that on several occasions during eighteen months of her supposed absence at Poona, she *must* have been in Dapoolie and paid small instalments in person; they therefore prayed instant inquiry, and that Dewchund might be summoned to bring his books.

The Court agreed, and sent off the summons to Dewchund, who lived quite close, Colt merely requested that no one of the accused should leave the court-room till Dewchund arrived. This was granted, and the Court sat in solemn silence for about half-an-hour, when Dewchund was seen walking with all his old jauntiness up the carriage-drive, some red-covered account-books under his arm. Entering the room, however, he caught sight of Colt, and simply collapsed!

The President called upon the head pension clerk to examine Dewchund, and with abject misery depicted in his countenance the former went through the preconcerted lesson.

“Do you know one Cassee Kom Nagoo?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Have you had money dealings with her?”

“Yes.”

“When has she paid you money with her own hand?”

“I will look at my books and tell you.” Books reluctantly untied and referred to by Dewchund. “She paid me on such a date Rs. 2, on another date Rs. 2 ‘hasta Khood,’ with her own hand.”

Books thereupon handed round to the Court, and extracts taken in silence.

Clerks and Dewchund evidently more chirpy, but Court glum, and looking coldly at Colt, who merely said, "Will the Court permit me to see those books?" "Certainly," says the President in his iciest manner.

Now Colt had been for some time a special officer of income-tax; he read Guzerati well, and was thoroughly up in all matters relating to native account-books. After a moment's inspection he quietly handed them back to the President, remarking—

"I demand that these books be impounded, and I take Dewchund in custody. These books have been tampered with! The leaves containing the entries have been interpolated."

Great excitement in the Court. The President observing, "Take care, sir; this is a most serious accusation you make, and it should be substantiated at once."

To which Colt replied—

"Let these miserable men—look at them, gentlemen!—let them nominate a member of a panchayet, or Jury, let the Court nominate another, and myself a third, and I agree to abide by their award."

No sooner said than done, and the panchayet in due course assembled. Colt's quick eye had detected one sufficient flaw which convinced him that a panchayet would find many more.

Native account-books are made of native paper, cut

with a sharp knife, like that of a shoemaker, from reams of paper in which there is usually a crease in folding. Every leaf cut, of course, has the same crease, and Colt instantly noticed that the leaves on which Cassee's items were endorsed had a different crease from the rest of the book, and therefore must have been recently sewn in. He also noticed that though there were entries for past years, checked at the Dewali item by item, when a small circular mark like the letter O is made at the left-hand of each item, there were no such marks on these particular pages !

To cut a long story short, the panchayet unanimously, by these and other details, pronounced the entries to be false. Colt took possession of Dewchund, the clerks sneaked off, and the Court proceeded to relate in the report to headquarters this "grand climax."

In "due course," that is to say, after some months deliberation, orders came down from army headquarters dismissing every soul in the Pension Pay Establishment, from the Paymaster down to the peons. In the then defective state of the criminal law it was found that no one could be prosecuted. I believe military pensioners have since been fairly treated ; but so long as men so ignorant have anything—be it a piece of paper, be it a simple token—that they think they can pledge, or that they can be persuaded is pledgable, so long will this villainous extortion exist in a greater or less degree according to the vigilance of the paymaster for the time being.

Colt in due course of time received the high commendations of the Secretary of State, and no one can deny that he merited them. What happened to Dewchund I do not remember. Tannak became a respectable character, and a very useful police informer, and died at a green old age, greatly looked up to by pensioners, and never weary of relating the incidents of the Court of Inquiry, where he boasted that Colt Saheb would have been helpless without him.

At some future time I shall have a story to tell about native account-books and their fabrication ; but, following the lines I have laid down, I must next address myself to the topic of undetected murders.

Moral—for those about to begin official life in India—learn to read well and write the vernacular of the district you are serving in. You will be but a belled cat otherwise. Read your own petitions yourself, to yourself, by yourself ; act on them with the utmost caution. Keep anonymous letters locked up, and don't speak of them even to your trusty "Sheristedar." Do not "rush your fence" when you do act, or you will find disappointment, and your zeal will be effectually extinguished.

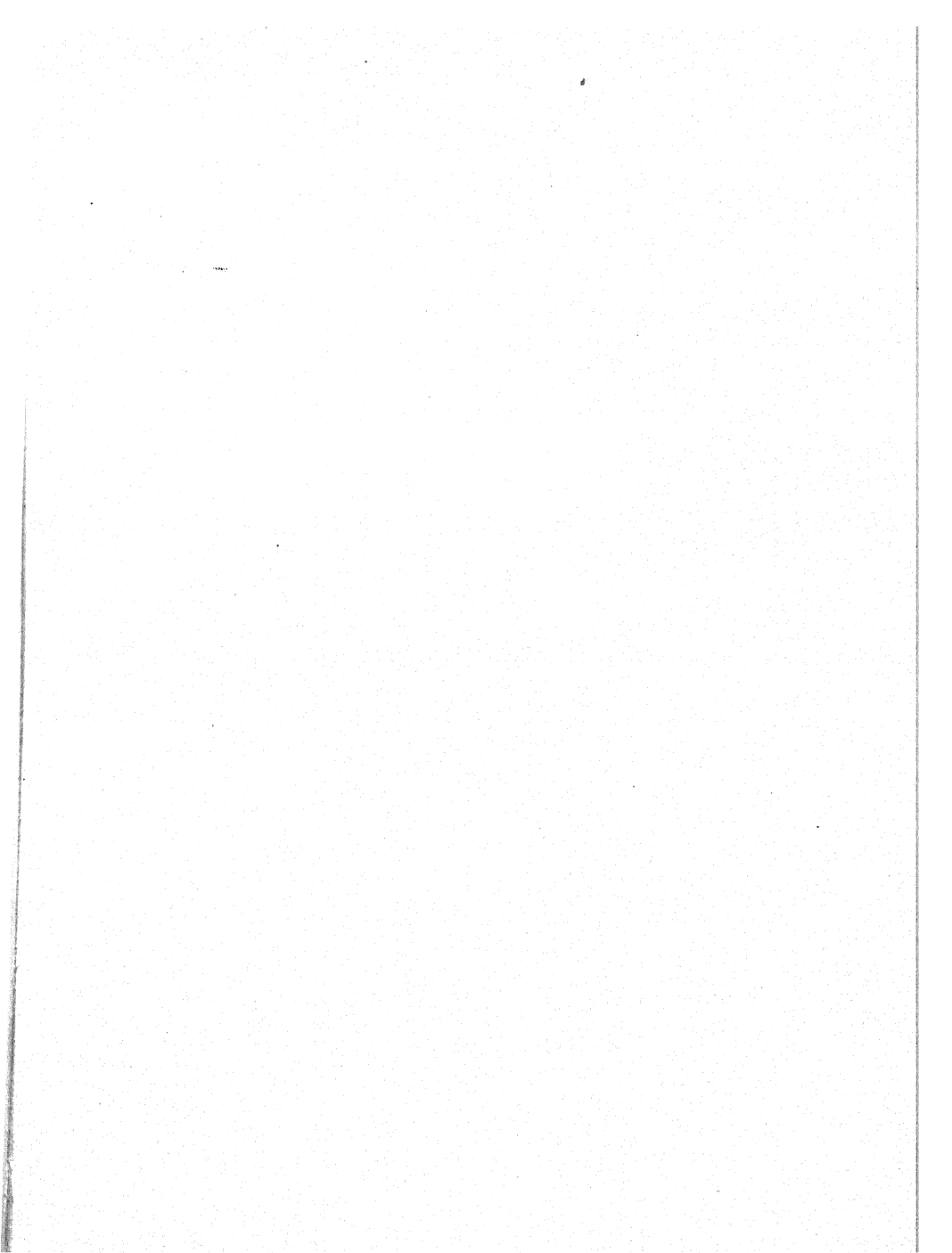
CHAPTER V

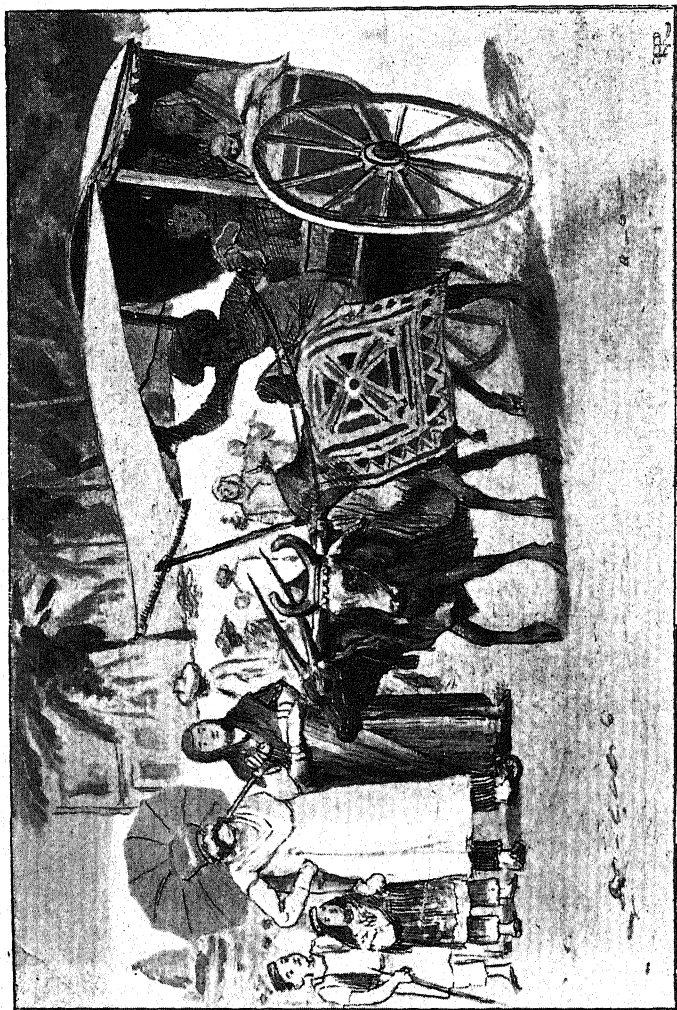
BUSSAPA'S REVENGE.

BEFORE recounting the history of another anonymous petition, it will be convenient to relate one more instance of vindictiveness, surpassing, and even more unnatural than that of Vinayek Deo, the "would-be parricide." It occurred in the southern Mahratta country some ten or fifteen years ago, and was duly chronicled in official reports as one of the most remarkable crimes of the year.

When I first knew Bussapa Patel, about 1863, he was as fine and promising a specimen of the young Mahratta as one would wish to see. About twenty years of age, tall for a Mahratta, strongly built, with a particularly frank and intelligent cast of countenance, he was the pride of his old father, Yellapa Patel, one of the most prosperous farmers in the cotton country, who had had him educated in much better style than was then customary among people of his class.

Yellapa, like all cotton growers in that part of the Western Presidency, profited enormously by the high price of the staple during the American war. Silver was poured into the country (literally) in





LES NOUVEAUX RICHES.

[To face p. 53.]

crores or millions sterling, and cultivators who previously had as much as they could do to live, suddenly found themselves possessed of sums their imaginations had never dreamt of. What to do with their wealth, how to spend their cash, was their problem.

Having laden their women and children with ornaments, and decked them out in expensive sarees (petticoats) they launched into the wildest extravagance in the matter of carts and trotting bullocks, going even as far as silver-plated yokes and harness studded with silver mountings. Even silver tires to the wheels became the fashion. Twelve and fifteen hundred rupees were eagerly paid for a pair of trotting bullocks.* Trotting matches for large stakes were common; and the whole rural population appeared with expensive red silk umbrellas, which an enterprising English firm imported as likely to gratify the general taste for display.

Many took to drink, not country liquor such as had satisfied them previously, but British brandy, rum, gin, and even champagne. Among these last was Yellapa, who was rarely sober during the last few months of his life, having by his example and encouragement made Bussapa a drunkard also.

About the time when Yellapa died the tide of prosperity turned. The American war at an end, down went the price of cotton, and a series of bad seasons set in, culminating with the great famine of 1876-77 and the rat plague. Silver tires, silver

* A rupee was then worth 2s. 3d.

ornaments, disappeared from every household, valuable cattle died from drought and disease, or had to be sold for what they would fetch ; and every farmer, Bussapa Patel among them, found himself heavily in debt to the village sowkar. Habits of drinking and reckless extravagance contracted during the "cotton mania" were not easily shaken off, and Bussapa went on from bad to worse, became extremely violent in temper when in his cups, and sullen and morose in his sober intervals.

His wife, to whom it was said he was deeply attached, then died, leaving him a fine, bright little boy of about five or six years of age. Little Bhow seemed to be the only thing Bussapa cared for, and he loved to send him out into the village, where he was a great pet, dressed in a little bright crimson jacket, and wearing such silver anklets and bangles as he could still afford to give him.

As may be well imagined, Bussapa's affairs had drifted into a well-nigh hopeless state by the end of the great famine. He had mortgaged all he had, including his "inam," or service land, to the principal banker in the village, and was only able to stagger along with the aid of small advances obtained from time to time from the same source.

Dewchund Shroff was not a bad sort of fellow, as sowkars go ; he and his father had had dealings with the Patels for many years, and the families were as intimate as Mahrattas and Wantias can be. Little Bhow was an almost daily visitor at Dewchund's shop, where he was always sure to get some sweet-

meat or other little treat dear to childhood. Latterly, indeed, Bhow passed nearly all his time out of school at or near Dewchund's place, for his father Bussapa's drunken violence frightened the little fellow, while Dewchund always made much of him.

Dewchund's relations with Bussapa gradually



BHOW AT DEWCHUND'S SHOP.

became strained; the latter's constant applications for fresh advances, his violence and obstinate refusal to go into his account, or to enter into a new bond, angered Dewchund, whose patience was finally exhausted when he learnt indirectly that Bussapa, instead of dealing exclusively with him, as had

hitherto been the understanding between them, had secretly obtained an advance on his coming cotton crop from a merchant at Coompta.

A stormy scene ensued between them, Dewchund taxing Bussapa with breach of faith, Bussapa retorting by vile abuse and threats of what harm he, as Patel, would do to the sowkar. Losing temper altogether, Dewchund at last told Bussapa that if he did not settle up within three days he would file a suit against him without further notice. During the next two days Bussapa drank heavily, and was hardly seen outside his house; but little Bhow, as usual, passed most of his time down at Dewchund's shop.

It afterwards transpired that Dewchund took no steps whatever to carry out his threat, and he always declared that he only uttered it in anger, that for the sake of old friendship he would have been willing to let matters go on as before, if Bussapa would only show himself fair and reasonable.

On the third night after the quarrel, Dewchund's shutters were up, and he was sitting about midnight making up his accounts in his shop, according to custom, when Bussapa knocked at the shutters and demanded admittance. Dewchund let him in, put up the shutters, and, turning round, saw Bussapa mouthing and muttering to himself in a corner. The man's haggard, blazing eyes and suppressed manner frightened Dewchund; he was about to call out, when Bussapa said, "Hold your tongue! I've brought your money. Where is the account?" On

this they sat down, Bussapa became seemingly calmer, and Dewchund produced the ledger and quietly made up the total with interest. The usual wrangle followed, but at last Dewchund agreed to knock off a good lump sum of interest, and Bussapa made him bring out the mortgage deed and other bonds, and told him to endorse them as discharged, and, moreover, to write out a receipt in full of all demands.

Dewchund demurred to doing this until he had secured, or at least had seen the money, which he supposed Bussapa carried about him in notes. Bussapa became very indignant at this, and got up, exclaiming, "I am not lying; I've brought the money value. Come and see. I put the bag in your out-buildings."

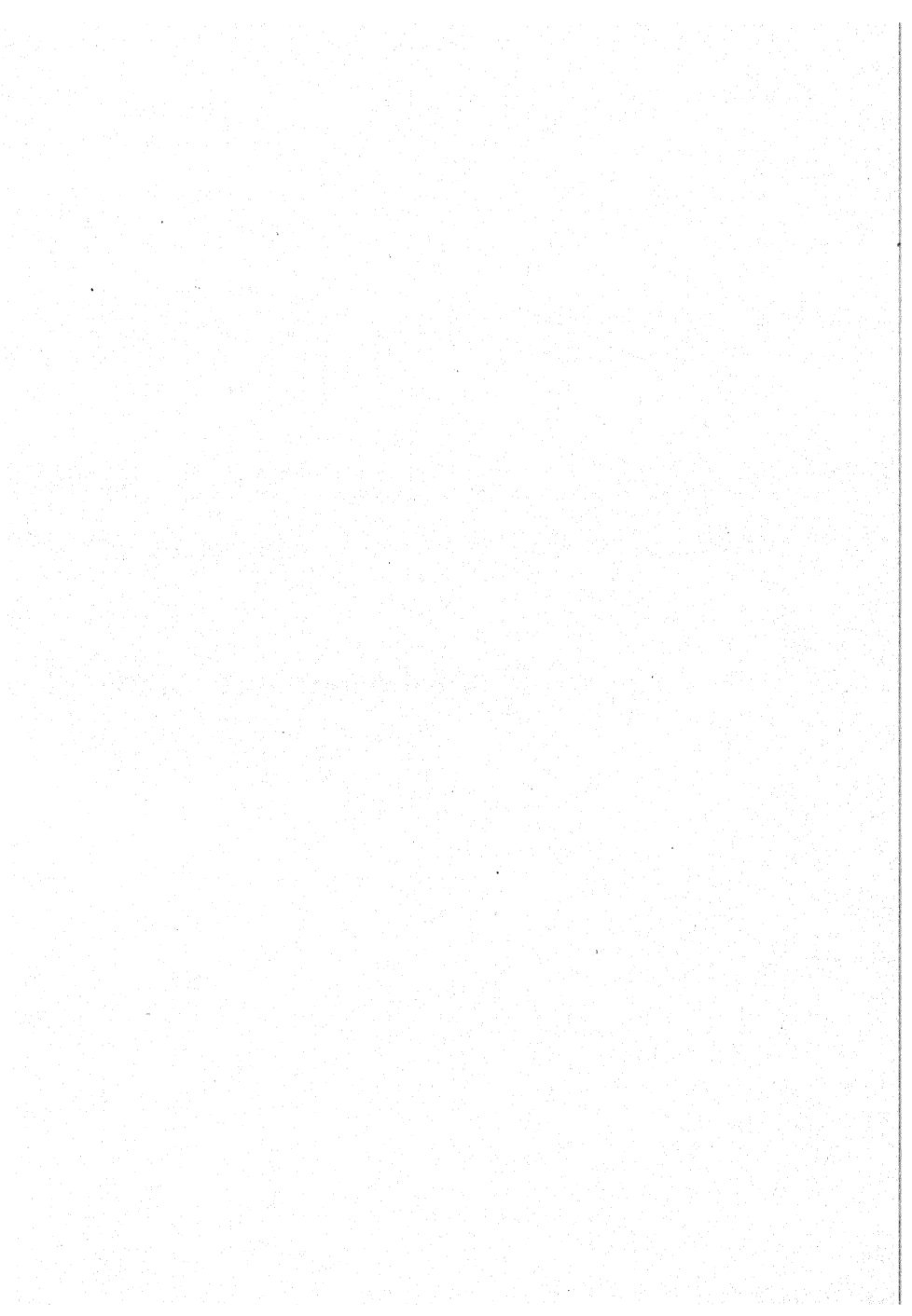
Rather surprised, and getting much alarmed, Dewchund lit a lantern, and they went into the back yard, Bussapa leading the way to a shed, in one corner of which was a large heap of dried cow-dung cakes, the fuel of the country, which had evidently been just disturbed. There Bussapa, putting down the lantern, suddenly seized Dewchund by the throat with one hand, so that he could not cry out, forced him to the ground, and, in suppressed tones, spoke rapidly into his ear, "You devil, I have paid you with my son's life! I've killed little Bhow, and hidden his body in that heap. If you don't agree to what I say, I'll raise the alarm now, and accuse you of having murdered him for the sake of his ornaments! Quick! If you consent, raise

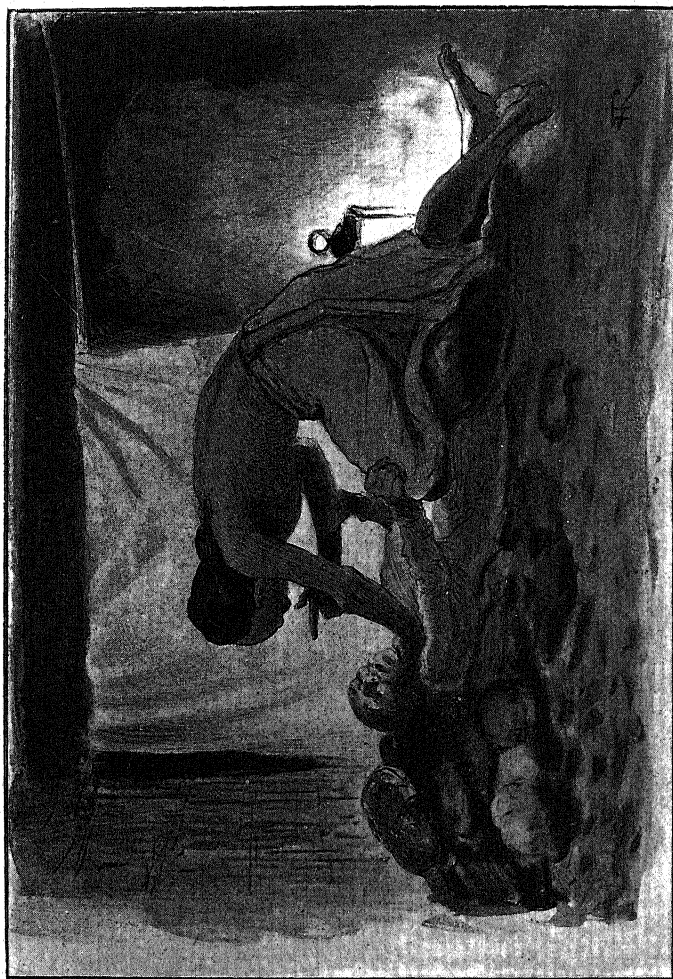
your arm, and then come back with me to the shop."

Stupefied with fear, Dewchund lifted his hand, and Bussapa, still holding him firmly, half led, half dragged him back to the house, where, after again threatening him if he should call out, Bussapa released his hold, and in the same suppressed fierce tone said, "Now you're paid, give me the papers and a receipt." Dewchund so far recovered his presence of mind as to ask what was to be done with the body, and Bussapa replied, "We will take it away, and bury it in the nullah (watercourse) presently." On this Dewchund gave up the papers duly endorsed, with trembling hand wrote out a receipt in full, and then followed Bussapa with the light to the shed.

Bussapa took out the poor little body from the heap of cow-dung, wrapped it in his blanket, and bade Dewchund lead the way to a dry nullah a few hundred yards off, and to carry a shovel with him. There Bussapa dug a deep hole in the loose shingle and buried the body, piling on large stones. It was near daylight when, returning by another route, they reached the confines of the village and separated, Bussapa assuring Dewchund that he need have no fear, as he should accuse some "Kaikarris,"* or basket-makers, then encamped near the village, of the murder.

* "Kaikarris" belong to the predatory tribes; ostensibly they are basket-makers. For a full account of them, see General Hervey's Diary before mentioned.





BUSSAPA'S REVENGE.

[To face p. 59.]

Dewchund crept home more dead than alive, shivering with terror, and feeling very little confidence in Bussapa's assurance. Bussapa, brooding devilishly over the events of the night, first destroyed all the papers by fire, and then tossing off cup after cup of raw spirit, communed with himself somewhat as follows : " That sowkar devil can't sue and disgrace me now, that's true ; and I now owe nothing, that's good ! But what a price ! How can I live without little Bhow ? Arè ! Arè ! What can I do ? . . . I must give the alarm directly about the little fellow's disappearance. . . . I'll have the Kaikarris' camp searched first . . . I can easily slip little Bhow's ornaments into one of their huts while making search . . . then the body will be found later in the day. . . . But stop a moment ! Why should I let that sowkar devil off after all ? He forced me to kill Bhow. He ought to die. . . . "

Falling at last into a drunken stupor, Bussapa was roused about nine in the morning by a servant asking where was " Bhow Baba," and he acted at once on the evil resolution he had already half formed. Heading a search-party he went from house to house, inquiring and looking in out-buildings, till they got to Dewchund's shop. Dewchund's face and terrified manner were enough to rouse suspicion ; the disturbed heap of cow-dung, the shovel, evidently lately used, added to it ; a neighbour had heard Dewchund returning to his house early in the morning ; a Kaikarri on the prowl had seen him

sneaking back to it ; there were tracks from the shed leading to the nullah ; the nullah was searched, fresh digging found, and the child's body was speedily exhumed.

Dewchund was seized and handed over to the police, and no one doubted that he really had strangled the poor little fellow, taken his ornaments, and disposed of the body in the dead of night. His incoherent protestations, his asseverations that Bussapa had killed his own son, were naturally regarded as the ravings of a detected criminal. The "Punchayat," or Coroner's jury, found that the little boy had been strangled by Dewchund for the sake of his ornaments, and though these were not found in his house, Dewchund was hurried off to jail, and ultimately brought before a magistrate.

With some difficulty a "vakil," or pleader, was found to defend him. Even he for some time placed no credit in the ghastly story Dewchund related, but at last he induced the magistrate to order a search of Bussapa's house, and there, in a bundle of Bussapa's own clothes, the few paltry ornaments were found concealed. Bussapa, in his besotted malignity, had forgotten to take them with him and secrete them in Dewchund's house when the alarm was first given ; and the police immediately taking possession of the house, he never found an opportunity of rectifying the omission afterwards.

Kept under strict surveillance after the discovery of the ornaments, and unable to obtain liquor, Bussapa's nerve gave way in a few days, and he

made a clean breast of it. Dewchund was released, and in due course Bussapa was arraigned, convicted, and hanged.

To the last his principal regret was that he had not done for Dewchund! And, indeed, had he not, in his bemuddled excitement, forgotten to take the silver anklets with him to Dewchund's house on the day of the latter's arrest, Dewchund would in all human probability have been hanged in his stead. The chain of circumstantial evidence against him lacked but this one link, and the true story of the crime as persisted in by him would have been set aside as utterly incredible.

Bussapa, in his confession, asserted, and no doubt truthfully, that the idea of sacrificing his son never entered his brain till just before he visited Dewchund on the fatal night—that it suddenly flashed across him in his rage and despair what a fine revenge this would be, how easy a release from Dewchund's clutches. The boy was sleeping beside him, was dead in a moment, and he was out on his way to the sowkar's house with the body before he fully realised what he had done. There is a saying, "Revengeful like a Canarese," and this tale hideously illustrates it.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDISCOVERED MURDER, UNPUNISHED MURDER, AND
KIDNAPPING.

I CALL to mind three very remarkable instances of undoubted murder, duly reported, which, despite the strong suspicion that there was against certain individuals, had finally to be struck off the register. Every police officer of superior grade must have encountered hundreds of such hard nuts to crack, and had to abandon them after months, or sometimes years, of unremitting watchfulness. Again, however, I maintain that the police are no more to be blamed in India than their much more intelligent and highly-trained *confrères* in England, working among a more civilised population, and are aided by telegraphs and railways in every direction. It is all very well to say "murder will out," but it by no means follows that the murderer *must* be found out. A considerable percentage of murderers always have defied, and always will defy, detection, and if the perpetrators bear the brand of Cain upon their brows, it is invisible to human eyes.

The first instance—which included kidnapping—occurred some twenty-five years ago on the confines

of a Mahomedan state near Bombay, where there was a constant demand for concubines among the higher and more powerful Mahomedans. At the time I speak of, and notably in the native state I refer to, the kidnapping of women from adjacent British territory was common. No case, however, has occurred for many years.

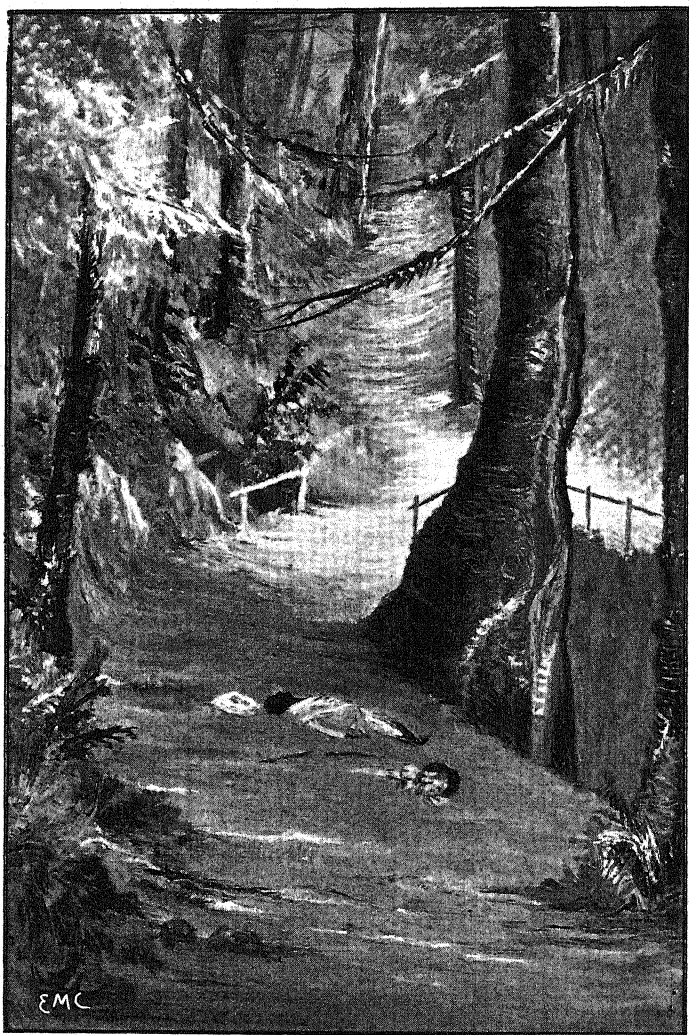
Balloo was a strapping young Mahratta residing in a small village on the confines of the state in question. He married almost a child-wife, whom he left with his mother and family while he went to Bombay to seek employment. He got on the G. I. P. Railway, and finally by good conduct was promoted to the post of gatekeeper. All this time he regularly remitted small sums for his wife's expenses, and occasionally received a letter from her written by the village koolkarnee (accountant).

Six months having passed without his having received any news, he became uneasy, and got a letter written to the "patel," or head man, of his village, asking for intelligence. The reply was that his wife was for the time absent from the village on a visit to her own mother, but would return shortly. Balloo did not quite like this, and with some difficulty obtaining leave, set out to go home and bring his wife back with him. Arrived at his village he found his wife absent, and his mother told him that she had been sent for by her mother a couple of months before.

Meantime, Balloo heard in the village an unpleasant rumour that about the time his wife left, a

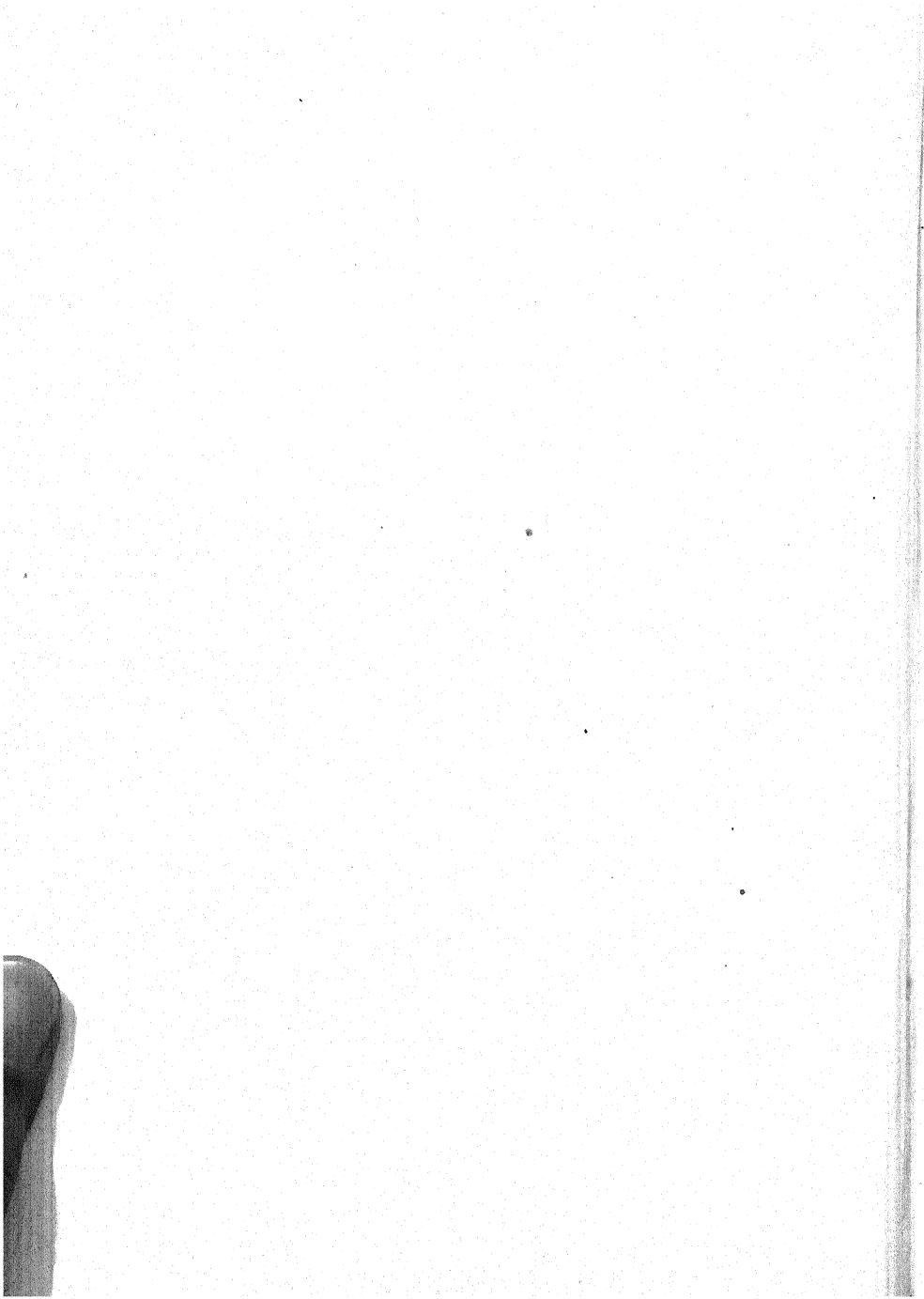
Mahomedan of some rank from the neighbouring state had visited the village and been entertained for some days by the patel. Balloo interviewed the patel the next morning, who said his wife was coming back that very day, proposed that they should go out to meet her as far as the next village. Now the way to that village ran through some very wild country and densely-wooded ravines. The simple fellow consented and then and there the pair started off. The patel returned in the evening and gave out that Balloo having met his wife had returned with her to her mother's house, and was afterwards going to take her with him to his place on the railway.

No suspicion whatever was excited, at the time, for the patel's story was plausible and probable enough; but a few months afterwards, in the hot season, a gowlee (herdsman) came upon a human skeleton in this particular jungle, the skull of which was fractured in pieces. Some half-rotten rags on the bones were identified by his mother as being those that Balloo went away in; she also pointed to a fractured front tooth which Balloo was known to have. Suspicion, of course, fell on the patel, who stoutly denied his guilt, but his former plausible tale was soon proved to be false in every way. Then came out the fact that two or three months before, at about the time the wealthy Mahomedan had visited the village, and Balloo's wife had also disappeared from the scene, the patel had been somewhat flush of cash, had bought cattle,



THE FATAL DELL.

[To face p. 64.]



had paid off debts, and seemed generally in flourishing circumstances.

Inquiries were then set on foot in the neighbouring state through the Political Agent, who employed Bombay detectives; who, after incredible difficulty, ascertained that Balloo's wife was living as one of the concubines of the Nawab's own uncle.

The greatest difficulties were, of course, thrown in our way by the Nawab's "darbar,"* so that when the patel was tried before the sessions, the Judge felt justified in receiving secondary evidence of Balloo's wife being alive and of where she was. Not a single reliable witness, however, could be obtained from the Native State! The Judge convicted the patel, but the "Sudder," or high court, reversed the conviction. The Judge, however, addressed a letter to the Government, recounting the circumstances, and there being several other serious matters pending against the same Nawab, Government took vigorous steps, which resulted not only in the restoration of Balloo's wife to her family, but in the release of some two hundred other women similarly kidnapped from British territory or brought over from Zanzibar.

It subsequently came out pretty clearly that the patel received some three hundred rupees from the agent of the then Nawab's uncle for kidnapping Balloo's wife. No doubt he counted on Balloo's staying away till there should be time for it to be rumoured with some plausibility that the girl had gone off of her own accord. Balloo's return and his

* Executive officer of the State.

pertinacity drove the patel to desperation, so he knocked poor Balloo on the head at the first suitable spot they came to during their last walk. This, however, is conjecture. In this particular case, at any rate, the police did their level best, and I remember at the time I thought, with the Judge, that they deserved considerable credit.

THE MARWARI MYSTERY.

The second case of undiscovered murder that I shall relate can be very briefly told. In a certain village there resided an old Marwari money-lender, believed to be very wealthy, and nearly every farmer near was in his books. He had a deed-box of bulky dimensions, visible to every one from the outer shop. Cash or notes he could produce to any amount, but he brought them from a secret hiding-place, known to no one, in an inner chamber. He slept in that room, which was the corner room of his adobe-built house. A greater skinflint and a more offensive old villain never lived. He possessed no friends, and every creditor far and near detested him.

His grand-daughter, a widow of about twenty-five, kept house for him. She slept in the corner room of the opposite side of his house. Two men (Purdèsees) as his private guard slept in an out-house adjacent. One midnight, the grand-daughter, hearing some noise from the old man's room, lit an oil light, and was about to enter his bed-room, when the door

opened and her grandfather appeared, blood pouring from his mouth and nostrils, his eyes protruding; he fell right on to her, extinguishing the light. The Purdèsees rushed in just in time to hear their master utter a few inarticulate sounds, before he died.

There was a police post about three miles off, so the police were quickly on the spot. It was found that a hole had been made in the adobe wall near the old man's bed large enough to admit the passage of a man. There were no signs of a struggle, except that the old man's mattress was saturated with blood. A trap-door in the floor was still locked, and when opened, the old man's bags of rupees, a tin box containing a large sum in currency notes, and a bundle of jewellery of considerable value were revealed. Nothing had been touched, and the deed-box was also unopened.

The post-mortem examination showed that the poor wretch had been partially smothered, and that by the knees of his assailant his ribs were mostly fractured and violently forced into his lungs; the wonder was how he could ever have risen again. Not the faintest clue was obtained. He was at enmity with all and every one, but no particular individuals had a special grudge against him. There was nothing to show that robbery had been intended.

The police took possession of the house, filled up the hole in the wall, and then took up their abode in the place, carefully avoiding, however, the old man's

room. They had been there some fourteen days when the room was entered in precisely the same manner and place, disgusting evidence of the entry being left behind. Intense personal hatred was, in my opinion, the motive for the crime, but no trace whatever of the criminals was discovered, nor was any one even suspected. The police, of course, who were grievously to blame in not detecting the second entry, were severely punished for their negligence.

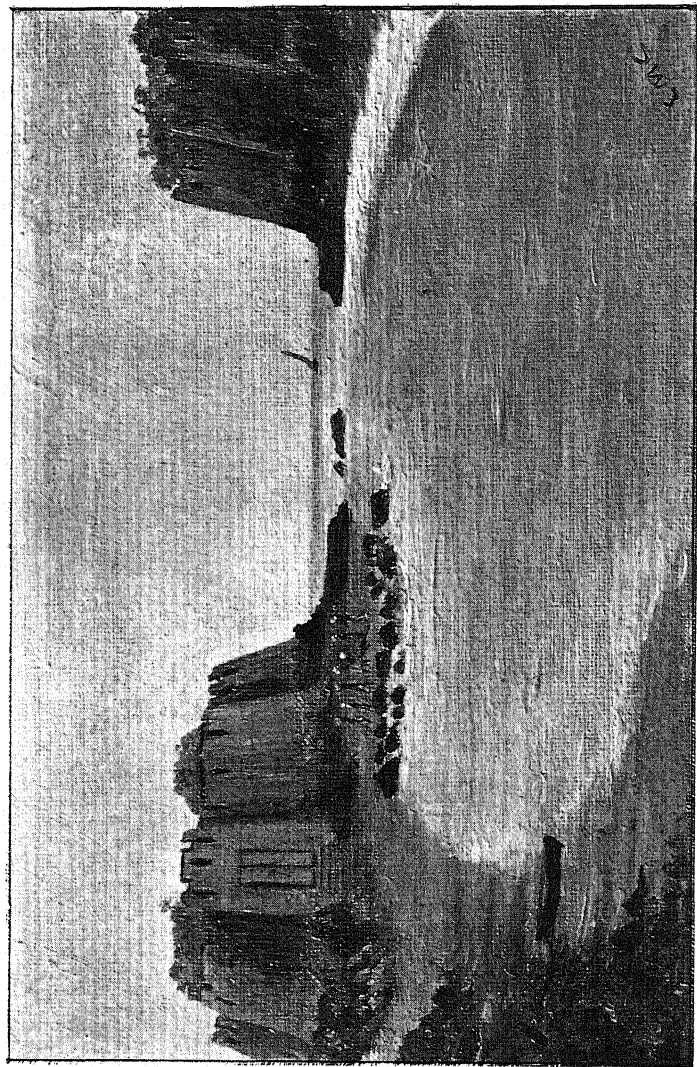
MURDER, SUICIDE, OR ACCIDENT?

The third and last doubtful case I shall narrate, though it was generally believed to have been a murder, may, I have always thought, have been an accident or a suicide. It was a peculiar case, because two Europeans were dragged into it.

I was at the well-known fair-weather port Hurnee down the coast, when about eleven in the morning, while the tide was running out, leaving here and there patches of rock more or less exposed along the shore, when news was brought to me that the body of a woman had just been washed up on to a rock plateau under the Severndroog Fort, in which were the headquarters of the sub-district.*

It was hardly a mile from my tent. Hastening to the spot, I found the body of a fine young woman,

* There are, or rather were, five forts close to each other. The two principal ones can only be seen from the point selected by my artist, which is close to the tomb of Tuláji Angria.



[To face p. 68.]

SEVERNDROOG, ALSO KNOWN AS HURNEE, FROM THE TOMB OF TULAJI ANGRIA.



nude, except as to the breast-cloth, which was rucked up under the arms by the wash of the waves. The people had just found her "sarree," or petticoat, caught on the rocks, which showed her to be a Mahomedan. The body was quite fresh, and she clearly had not been dead more than an hour or two. There was only one serious injury observable,—a severe contused wound on her temple, which had evidently bled considerably; there were also scratches all over the body, probably caused after death by the body tossing about among the barnacle-covered rocks.

The usual "punchayet," or jury, had already made their report—that the woman had been murdered by some person or persons unknown. I, however, promptly sent the body up to the Civil Hospital, which happened to be some eight miles distant, at Dapoolie. In due course I received a report that the wound on the head, though not of itself sufficient to cause death, had probably stunned the woman, causing her to fall into the water, or that her head had struck a rock in falling, and she had been drowned while unconscious. There was no other cause of death, and the woman, the doctor said, had probably died about six or seven in the morning.

She had been immediately identified as the wife—the erring wife—of an absent fisherman, and had been seen making her way over the jagged boulders of the rocky groin I have spoken of, about six o'clock that morning, carrying with her the kind of creel

which native women use when picking shell-fish off the rocks. The little port was full of "pattimars" (native craft), by which, in those days, the whole traffic, goods and passenger, of the coast was worked. It was blowing a stiff north-wester, and all the craft lay at anchor under a headland near.

I was just settling down to work, after return to camp, when an excited crowd approached. In the midst of it walked two very irate Europeans. Of course the cry was that these two "soldier lôk" having first ravished the woman, had then thrown her into the sea. With some difficulty I cleared the neighbourhood, and was able to interrogate the two men. One of them was an army schoolmaster travelling up to a new situation beyond Bombay; the other was a sergeant who had served for his pension. The papers in each case were in order; they were sailing up at Government expense, and were to all appearance as decent fellows as one could wish to meet.

They said that, as the tindal (native captain) of their "pattimar" told them that they could not proceed in the face of the north-wester, they had got him to land them in the ship's small boat, so that they might get a little exercise. The headland was about two miles off, and it was easy to send for the tindal to ascertain at what hour he had put them ashore; meantime I examined their clothes carefully for blood-stains, but found none.

The tindal deposed that he had landed them about 10.30 A.M. at the headland, two miles

distant, so that they clearly could never have seen the woman who was found dead before 8 A.M. Native malice, however, insisted on their guilt, the nearest Mahratta newspaper in its next issue accused me of hushing up the matter, while half-a-dozen anonymous letters were sent to Government accusing me of all kinds of crimes !

I stayed some time in the neighbourhood, but could get no evidence beyond vague female gossip that one of the deceased woman's female relatives had seen a man leave her house very early in the morning, that words had passed, that the old crone who saw Lothario sneaking off had said she would tell the husband when he came home. I was at last convinced that this was about as near the truth as we were likely to get. I tried to get the case struck off the murder register, but was severely snubbed for my pains.

I have mentioned these cases because they illustrate the great need for a strong infusion of detective element into our police, a point on which, in its proper place, I shall hereafter lay much stress. In the kidnapping case the political agent had the aid of experienced native detectives from Bombay, who have always been good men—they, at any rate, elicited the truth. But in the other two cases I was helpless, I had no trained detective in the force, nor had I the funds to pay for them ; I should only have been rebuked had I ventured to ask superior authority for what I needed. Similarly, I ought to have had in the old Marwari's case a man who, on some plausible

pretence, would have settled down for a time in the village, and gradually ferreted out the village secrets. In this last case, also, I wanted a detective of the fisherman class to worm the truth out of the deceased's lovers and her own belongings.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSING TIGER ; OR, CAIN AND ABEL.

I PURPOSE dealing in this chapter with the well-worn subject of unreported murders. A general and well-founded belief obtains in India that not one-half the murders committed are ever brought home to the criminal. My own experience of a lifetime has convinced me that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that not twenty-five per cent. of murders committed are even heard of.

I do not advance this startling statement from any feeling of prejudice against the Indian populations among whom I have laboured ; on the contrary, the same allegation may be justly made against most European nationalities, with reference to the unlawful taking of life in all the large cities of the Old and New World. Unless I am very much mistaken, if the statistics could be compared of reported murders in Great Britain and India in any one year, it would be found that, taking due account of population, the percentage of murders reported is larger in the former than in the latter country, yet the proportion of convictions would be more

numerous in Great Britain, by reason of the total want of detective agency in India.

Abandoning these speculations, however, as somewhat foreign to the subject in hand, I must point to the climate, the great distances between the stations occupied by men in authority—the magistracy and the police—and especially to the usual mode of disposing of the dead by cremation, which effectually and in a few hours after the crime destroys the principal evidence or means of tracing it.

Time was—and it is not so very long ago—when a clumsy criminal procedure, involving the dragging of witnesses from their homes for weeks and months together, led to what I may almost term the habitual combination of the people of a village in which a murder might have been committed to conceal the fact if possible. I shall make a remarkable instance of this kind the principal story of this chapter. I well remember how, in old days, it was the regular thing, first of all, for the police to assemble in force at the ill-fated village, to summon most of the villagers to the chowrié (village office) to harangue and browbeat them, to keep them for hours, and even days, from their occupations, for no other earthly reason than to display their power, and let Jack Policeman show off in office.

The case might be distant one to eighty miles from the nearest Magistrate to whom the accused and the witnesses were dragged off—the more respectable commonly refusing the niggardly maximum of four annas per diem tendered to them for their

expenses; the poorer obliged by sheer poverty to accept the minimum two annas.

I must do the overworked Magistrates and Assistant-magistrates of those days the justice to say that no criminal case of any kind was ever delayed by them. It was almost a point of honour to set other duty aside, to sit down to the criminal case newly arrived, and not to leave it till it was disposed of. If it happened to be a murder case, committal being made to the sessions Judge, it had to wait till the sessions, which might be at any time—a month, two months, three months distant; there were even not a few outlying or inaccessible stations at which a full-power Judge only sat twice in a year! All the witnesses were then necessarily sent to their homes, to be collected again a few weeks or months later, and driven like a flock of sheep to the Sessions station, often a hundred or one hundred and fifty miles from their place of residence.

Conceive the intolerable annoyance, the serious loss, the risk of illness to the witnesses under such a system, and my readers will not be surprised at the desire to suppress a murder! I shall be told, "*Nous avons changé tout cela.*" So we have, to a marvellous extent. Good roads and railways, a very sufficient and a fairly efficient Magistracy, are now besprinkled over the country, but, best of all, a Criminal Sessions is held every month, even in the most benighted regions, while the power to order a special sessions is largely made use of when anything like a good case is made out for it.

It has been my lot to see much of the working of the police and criminal procedure in England since I took off my Indian harness, and I affirm that, *on the whole*, justice is much better administered in the Western Presidency than it is in England at the present moment. The remark is probably equally true for all the old presidencies, but I can only speak from my own knowledge and experience. Most people are familiar with that portion of *Truth* in which Mr. Labouchere every week pillories inefficient Magistrates, and there have been not a few cases even in the highest courts of late which have justly aroused severe criticism. I venture to affirm that the Registrar of the High Court on the Mofussil side in Bombay could not, in any one month, find in the returns of the Bombay Presidency, with its thousands of Magistrates, enough material to supply a similar number of columns for *Truth*.

After this long, but, I trust, pardonable digression, I will betake me to the tale of "The Missing Tiger." There is nothing to be alarmed at, for this is not a typical Indian "tiger story!"

Many years ago (alas, how many!), when I was engaged in the Southern Konkan upon the police duty described in the first story, I was joined in the month of October by a certain well-known lawyer. I will not give his name, but may mention that he is still alive, very flourishing in his circumstances, very portly, and *very much married*. He was anxious to see something of Mofussil tent life, to work off the heavy "tiffins," or luncheons, at the

old Indian Navy Club, and to get a little shooting, for which he brought down a battery equal to anything, from a snipe to an elephant! We were making our way across to a new camp over a very rough piece of laterite country, then covered with long grass and scrub jungle. After a long forenoon after the



MEETING THE "IXPRESH."

snipe, as we struck into the main track leading to our camp, we descried a mhar (village watchman) trotting along briskly, and catching him up, I observed the man carried a letter, which, being addressed "*Urgent*" to the police havildar at my nearest post a few miles off, I took the liberty of opening and reading. It was from the police patel (head man) of a village some eight miles distant,

and reported that two brothers (mhars) had gone out together in the early morning to cut grass and brushwood, when a tiger had sprung out, killed one of them, and carried off the other; that he would keep the mutilated body till sundown, and hold an inquest before burning it, and was collecting men to search for the missing man.

Now I knew the village and the neighbourhood well enough to be certain that it was most unlikely for a tiger to harbour within thirty miles of the spot. However, it was my duty to go there, and my friend of the law was very keen to try his big smooth-bore. So I sent the mhar back with a message to say the police saheb and his friend were coming as soon as possible—he, the patel, was to have as many beaters ready as he could collect—and that the police saheb would arrange about the inquest.

We went on to camp close by, whence what with breakfast, and what with my friend's complicated shooting preparations, we could not get off till after two o'clock, leaving us but two hours to cover the distance. A man on the look-out took us to a small rest-house at the side of the road, where we found the patel and a goodly crowd of beaters.

The body, stretched stark on its back on a kind of litter, was first cursorily inspected, its appearance, as it lay with arms stretched straight down the sides, appeared to bear out the report; the right side of the face was crushed and swollen, the right eye was nearly torn out, as it were, by a tiger's

claw. It looked, in fact, just as if the poor wretch had received a crushing blow from behind from a tiger's paw.

I ordered it to be kept as it was, while we, beaters and all, hurried off to the scene of the tragedy, for there was not much daylight to spare. The path lay along the brink or edge of a dell, the high grass showing every track through it. The man who found the body walked first with me, and soon pointed to a depression in the dell. I made the guide and gun-bearers walk in single file, taking the lead myself, so that I could note in what direction any animal might have dragged the missing man while I sent the beaters round the hillside with my friend, with instructions to advance in a circle when I gave the signal.

This was soon done, for the scrub only extended over a small area. I then went cautiously down to the spot indicated by the guide, and there, sure enough, were abundant evidences of a severe struggle. The grass was trodden down in a circle of about eighteen feet diameter, and there was abundance of blood; *but* I instantly observed that, except by the track by which I had come down, there was no disturbance or trampling of the grass, not the faintest sign of any large beast having passed through it, or dragged anything with it!

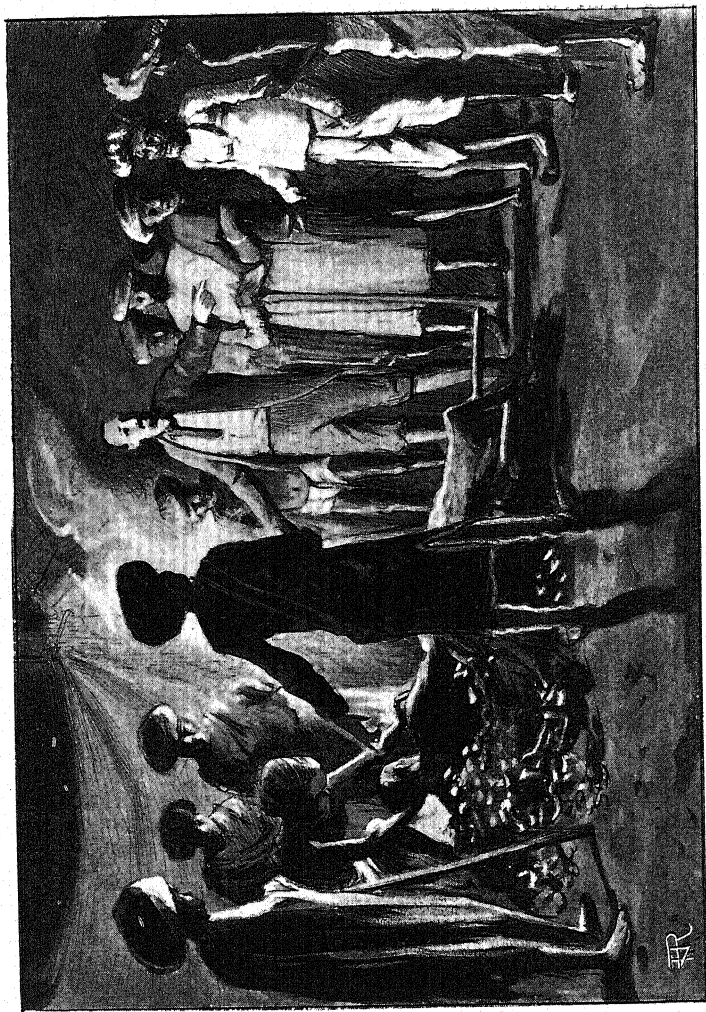
I gave the signal for the beat to begin, however, and soon heard shouts and yells and my friend's voice in excitement, evidently running very fast. Presently as a large sounder of hog broke back

through the beaters, I caught a glimpse of my poor lawyer as he came what the Yankees call "an almighty cropper" over a boulder, firing off both barrels in the fall! How the poor fellow had barked his shins! As to his gun, both barrels were dented and the stock broken! We made our way back to the rest-house, where I had torches lit and selected the jury.

At this time the patel and other villagers tried hard to persuade me just to note the appearance of the corpse as it lay, and to let them proceed to burn it; indeed, it *was* awfully "high" by that time! I insisted, however, after noting down the appearances on the front, on having it turned over on its face, and then the "murder was out!" A most ghastly sight presented itself, and the whole scene of the murder was revealed!

The poor wretch had evidently been squatting, cutting brushwood—I forgot to mention that a small bundle of it was lying in the dell covered with blood—when his brother struck him from behind with his own "koiti," or bill-hook, on the back of his head, the curved point of the implement entering his right eye. Instinctively he must have raised his left arm to ward off a second blow, for there was a deep gash and a slice of nearly-severed flesh on the under part of his arm. Several other blows, breaking the vertebræ, must then have been rained on him, till the murderer, seeing life was extinct, left him and fled.

The villagers and patel then confessed their deceit.



THE INQUEST: "MURDER WILL OUT."

[To face p. 80.]



The deceased and his brother Kannak had a long-standing feud about a miserable plot of land ; probably high words passed in that fatal dell before Kannak struck his brother down. The villagers guessed the truth directly the body was found, and they had a quiet debate as to how the matter should be hushed up, none of them relishing the idea of being hurried up to the Sessions Court as I have above described.

It was the patel who suggested the "fixing up" of the body as I first saw it; the gash and flesh of the arm was plastered up somehow with cow-dung, and lying on its back the corpse looked very like a case of tiger mauling. Kannak was gone, and not likely to return ! It was a long way to the police post, and the havildar might be away ; if so, well and good. The "Punchayatnama," or jury's report was a simple matter, and the body could be burnt at sundown. If the policeman did turn up before, he would be easily deceived, or if not deceived, could be bribed to join in the plot and hold his tongue.

Luck was against them, however, that time. Kannak was caught in a foreign neighbouring state within a week, and duly committed for trial ; he then feigned insanity, refused to eat, *et-cætera*. So the case was traversed to another Sessions that he might be watched. In due time I had the great satisfaction of giving evidence and hearing him sentenced to death. The patel afterwards got a pretty severe sentence.

There can be no doubt that but for my accident-

ally meeting the messenger the plot would have succeeded to the full, and the case have been recorded as one of "death by wild animals." Many and many a murder is, I am quite certain, even now reported as death from snake-bite, a false "Punchayatnama" drawn up, and the body quietly burned !

I forgot my poor legal friend ; he was really seriously bruised and shaken, as well as his blunderbuss, and I doubt if he ever tried running through long grass over rocky ground again.

CHAPTER VIII.

THUGGEE.—THE MASSACRE.

It is somewhat of a coincidence that just as I was about to put together a few notes on the subject of murder by Thugs, the *British Medical Journal* should publish an article bearing materially on the subject. It is, and has been for some years, a popular belief among Indian officials that, with the suppression of the Thugs proper, who despatched their victims by strangulation, in the manner so graphically described by Captain Meadows Taylor in his 'Confessions of a Thug,' there has been a steady increase in murder by poisoning, and that those who have resorted to it are, in point of fact, Thugs, worshippers of the fell goddess Bhowáni, practising their trade, like the "Phansigars," * for the purposes of gain.

I myself doubt if there is any solid ground for this belief; my own experience has not taught me so. When I first went to India, in the early fifties, Thuggee was not quite stamped out in the older Presidencies. Duty, in connection with the tracing out of an organised system of dacoity, on several occasions took me to the Jubbulpore School of

* "Phansigars" take their name from "phansi," a noose.

Industry, where I have interviewed many Thugs ; others have from time to time been sent down into districts I was serving in to give information, or to identify suspected Thugs. I certainly never heard from these persons that the suppression of the use of the sacred "roomal," or handkerchief, had driven the votaries of Bhowáni to the use of poison in its place ; nor do I remember in official reports by the able officers, who up to the present time have superintended the suppression of Thuggee, that they were in possession of any evidence in support of the theory.

It must always be borne in mind that the discovery of murder by poisoning, whether by *dhatura*, opium, or arsenic, has year by year become easier, since the means of communication have improved. There were probably just as many, or even more, cases of poisoning before the "fifties" as since then, but they were not brought to light, because there was rarely a person competent to trace poisons in the viscera within reasonable distance of the spot where the body was found, and the very transport of the portions required for analysis was nearly impossible. Now, every native district officer knows precisely what to do. There are fairly competent medical practitioners scattered throughout the country, and it may almost be said that in most cases of suspected poisoning the viscera find their way to the Government Analyst.

I can personally vouch for Captain Meadows Taylor's having had no suspicion that Thuggee by poisoning existed when he left India, for I had the

pleasure of knowing that accomplished and able officer well—I know that he believed the measures taken by Government had then led to the almost total suppression of Thuggee in every form. I can only call to mind one case of poisoning that at all resembled Thuggee, and, if I mistake not, it was subsequently proved beyond all question that the poisoners were Mahomedans from the Nizam's territory.

Not so very many years ago, during one of the many scarcities in the “arid zone” of the Western Presidency, fodder and water having already become very scarce, five Mahrattas from the south of Sholapore—which is now, I believe, a part of the Bijapore District—determined to drive over all their surplus cattle into the Nizam's territory, there to sell the beasts for what they would fetch. Their nearest route lay through a very desolate and rugged country, which forms the boundary of the British and Nizam's (or Mogulai) territories. They disposed of their herd in the course of a month, converted their money into British rupees (which attracted some attention to them), and set out on their return journey, with the cash, some fifteen hundred rupees, divided amongst them.

Being from British territory, they were unarmed, of course, and merely carried iron-shod sticks for their defence. On the borders they were overtaken by a Mahomedan, apparently of some condition, mounted on a good horse, richly caparisoned, accompanied by a man on foot, ostensibly his servant.

Both master and man were armed to the teeth, to the dismay of the Mahrattas who naturally feared that they would be attacked ; but the Mahomedan "gentleman" entered urbanely into conversation, mentioned that he was in the Nizam's police service, one of a patrol recently established along the frontier to check the depredations of Hussan Khan, a noted freebooter of the day. His road, he said, for a couple of marches, was the same as theirs, and perhaps the Mahrattas had better keep with him for the time.

The simple fellows readily agreed, were regaled by their escort with any amount of boasting of his prowess, wealth, and influence, and easily induced to tell their own story, confiding to their kind escort that they carried a considerable amount of cash among them. Nothing occurred during the first night that they camped together. The two Mahomedans, of course, cooked and ate separately, but within a few paces of the Mahrattas.

Next day the march was resumed, the whole party camping as before on the bank of a small rivulet in some scrub jungle ; they were to part company at daybreak, as the Mahomedans said they must go southward.

About ten the next morning another small party of herdsmen were about to encamp with their cattle at the same place, when they heard deep groans from the scrub near ; proceeding to the spot they found one of the Mahrattas vomiting and writhing with pain, and apparently at the point of death. However,



THE LAST SUPPER.

[To face p. 86.]



they attended him to the best of their power : towards evening he had revived sufficiently to tell his story, which was to the effect that he and his four companions had, one after the other, been seized with mortal sickness after their evening meal, that he believed he was the only survivor, and that the bodies of the others would be found at no great distance, probably rifled, as he found he himself had been robbed of all the money he carried.

In a few moments the bodies of his four companions were found in the bush near, lying, distorted and stiff, within a few yards of each other. Needless to say, they too had been rifled of the cash they carried.

The survivor had not much recollection of what had passed, he had not felt very well the preceding day, had therefore eaten very sparingly, and when subsequently racked by pain, he tried to crawl down to the water, and must have become insensible. Some of the food they had all eaten was found close to the camp fire, one of the good Samaritans of the second party had the sense to take possession of it, and to send two of his men back to the nearest British police post with full information. The bodies were at last taken to a dispensary some forty miles distant, where the doctor took out the viscera, bottled them, and sent them, with the food, to the Government Chemical Analyser in Bombay, who found enough arsenic to kill half a regiment.

Not a trace of the Mahomedan gentleman was ever discovered. A man was apprehended in the Mogulai

territory on suspicion of being the servant, but the surviving Mahratta did not identify him. The Nizam's authorities were promptly communicated with, but their police officials were so lax that no real effort, I am sure, was ever made to trace the murderers. More than likely, the Ameens (Nizam police officers) were bribed to hush up the matter. As to our own police, they were useless over the border, and there were no detectives in the force to send to trace out the criminals at leisure.

The case caused some stir at the time, being believed by many to be a case of Thuggee poisoning. As a matter of fact, it was a simple case of poisoning for the sake of robbery, by poisoners who were genuine, and not pretended Mahomedans. There may be a few "Phansigars," or genuine Thugs, still using the holy "roomal," or handkerchief, in remote parts of native states, but I am convinced there are none left in British territory.

There are, no doubt, a tolerable number of men who poison for the sake of robbery, but even these ordinarily hail from and retreat to native states, usually administering arsenic in large quantities, because that is the easiest poison to procure, and the most rapid and certain in its effect. They have a profound belief that "dead men tell no tales."

CHAPTER IX.

CHILD-MURDER FOR ORNAMENTS.

I FEAR there is still rather a heavy annual crop of murders of children for the sake of their ornaments, but the incessant warnings of the authorities have unquestionably had some effect. Children are not allowed to run about unattended and unguarded with valuable ornaments on their bodies so much as they used to be, and I am given to understand that the record of this class of crime is steadily on the decrease.

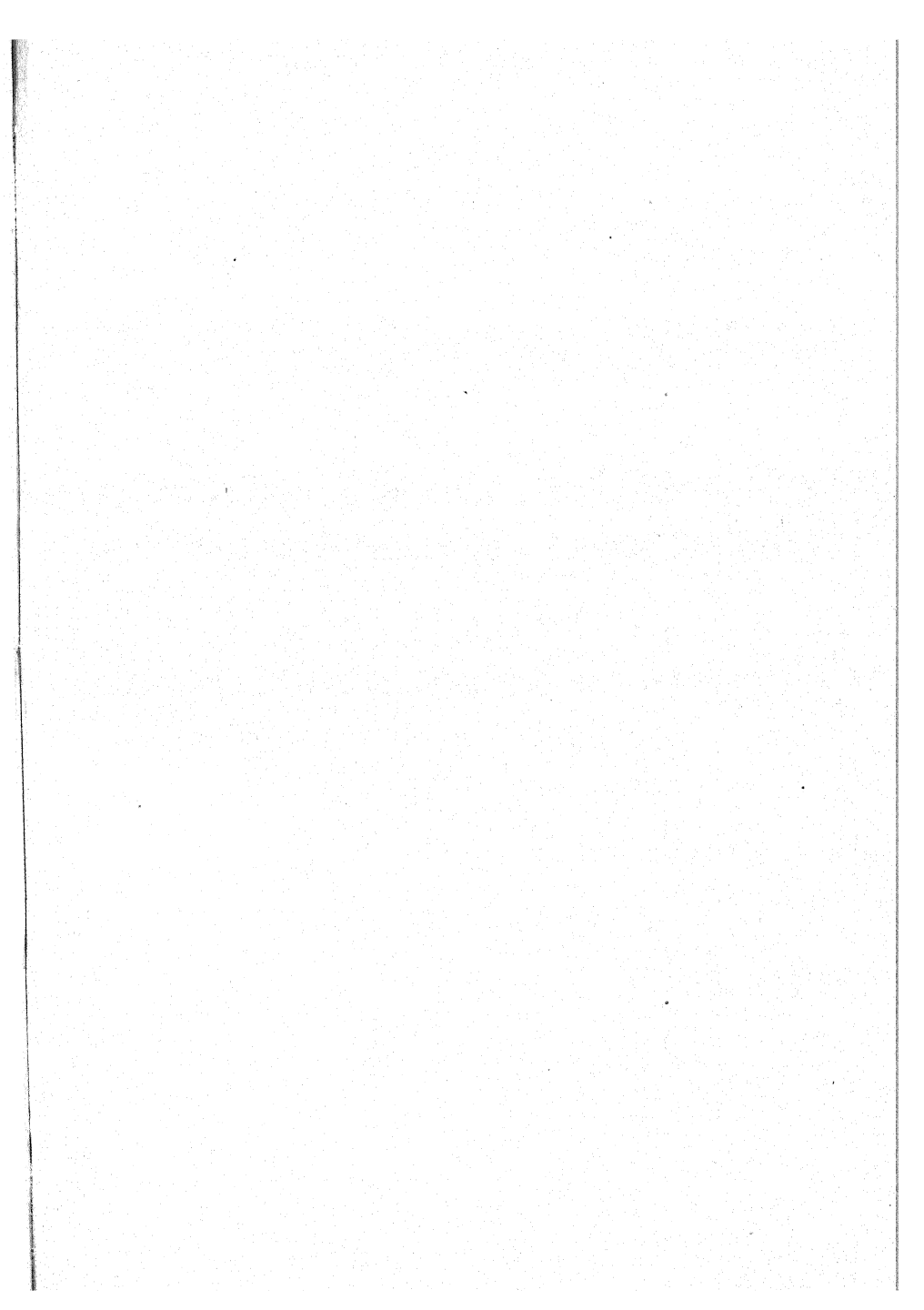
Children, no doubt, are often merely robbed of their clothes or valuables ; for among the hideous old crones who abound, especially in towns, and who live—God knows how—there are a fair number of old “Mrs. Browns,” whose cupidity is often aroused by the sight of little victims like “Florence Dombey.” Murder of children for the sake of their ornaments is usually the work of men, generally of the trading classes. I am afraid that I must add that the lowest classes of Marwarrees, “Goozurs,” or Wanis, furnish the most instances. One remarkable case I remember, however, in which a Mahomedan, previously of the highest character

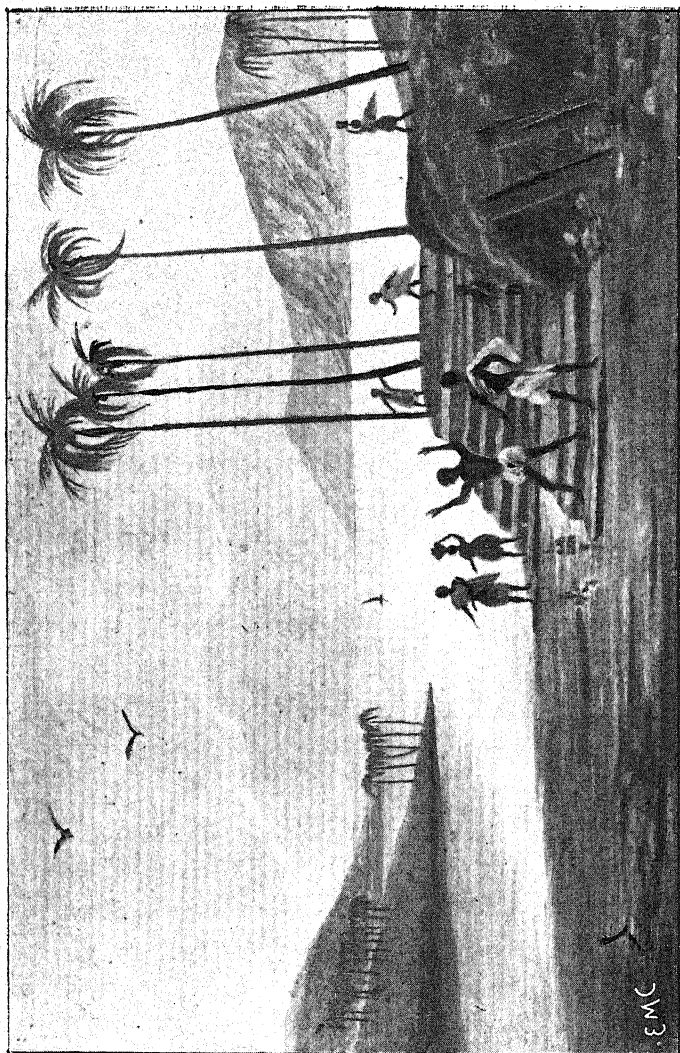
and the most humane disposition, was the criminal. The story is noteworthy for other reasons, which will appear hereafter. I shall call it—

"POOR LITTLE SALOO."

Saloo was a bright little fellow about seven years of age. His father was in charge of the ferry up an estuary not far from Bombay, plying daily from his own rather large village, by wind and tide, to the mouth of the creek. This ferryman's great crony was a Mahomedan general merchant, or large shop-keeper in the village, a man of about forty, very well to do, with a reputation for honesty, and notoriously generous and open-handed to the poor. Like most natives he was very fond of children, but, having none of his own, he always liked to see them about his shop, and petted them one and all.

He had carried Saloo about in his arms from baby hood, and the little fellow, his father being so much away from home, lived almost as much with Suliman (that was his name) as in his own house. The father almost daily brought some package or other for Suliman by the ferry-boat, thus it was an every-day occurrence for Suliman to go down to the bunder, about half a mile distant, with Saloo trotting by his side, about the time the tide served for the ferry-boat to come in. Now, the "bunder," or landing-place, was at the end of a long embankment projecting into deep water over an intervening mangrove swamp, which was only covered by a few





THE DENOUNCING HAND.

[To face p. 91.]

feet of water at the very top of the tide; for the most part it was a foul and noisome stretch of deep black mud dotted with mangrove bushes.

The ferry-boat was due after dark one evening, when Suliman was seen making his way to the bunder, chatting and laughing with Saloo, who trotted by his side. When the ferry-boat at last arrived, the father hailed Suliman and asked if he had brought little Saloo. Suliman replied that he had brought him down, but that as it had got late he had sent him home again. The two friends, having made fast the ferry-boat, walked home together, accompanied by some of the passengers, and the father's being the first house they came to, he called out to "Saloo Meeya." The mother's voice replied from within that he had gone down to the bunder with "Suliman Baba." Suliman observed that he had probably gone to his shop, and that he would send the little monkey home at once.

He returned in a few minutes in the greatest agitation to report that Saloo Meeya was not there, that he was seriously afraid he had fallen into the creek. Torches were got, and all the village turned to the bunder, but the tide was at full, and no trace of the little fellow could be seen. Searching parties were down again next morning directly the tide had left the foetid swamp uncovered, in the midst of which was soon descried a little hand and arm sticking up out of the soft mud. There was poor little Saloo, dead, with his mouth and nostrils full of mud. The little armlets encircling his arms were

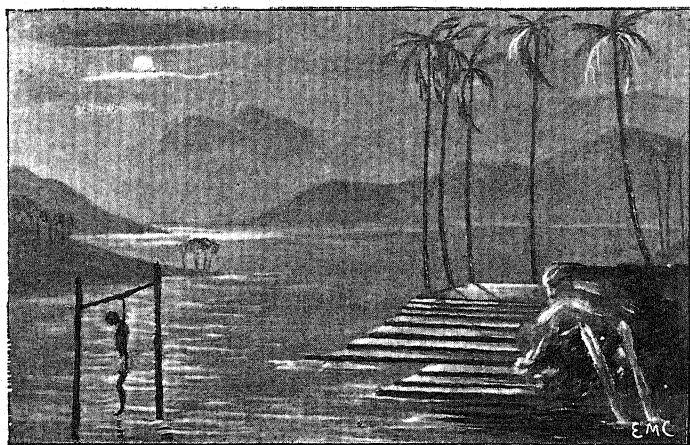
gone, and abrasions on the tender flesh showed that they had been wrenched off with some violence !

At the pitiful sight, Suliman, who was with the search-party, and evidently greatly agitated, screamed out that he had done it. "I was mad. Come, and I will give up the bangles." He was taken to his house, and produced the miserable trifles from a sack of rice.

I was on the spot two days afterwards, heard the wretched man tell the tale, and accompanied him to the scene of the tragedy. If ever a man felt remorse, that man felt it. He told me—and I am very sure he spoke truly—that he acted without premeditation ; that he never thought of the ornaments until they were near the bunder-head, when he took Saloo up in his arms, and, in doing so, happened to feel the ornaments. "There was no one near, and 'Shaitan' took him." He carried the boy a few yards into the ooze, and, taking up a handful, crammed it into the little fellow's mouth, stifling his cries. He wrenched off the bangles, trod the little body into the mud, and, regaining the bunder-head, had time to wash his feet and hands before the ferryman's boat came up.

"Why, saheb," said he, "what did I care for ? How could I want those worthless bangles ? And I was so fond of Saloo Meeya, too ! Not a month has passed for years that I haven't given the boy more than the worth of the bangles. I used to see them every day, and never thought of them. I was mad ! It is my fate ! Take me to the Judge Sahab quickly, and let me be hanged."

Hanged, of course, he was, on the very spot at which the crime was committed, for there had been overmuch of this class of crime of late; but he could not have lived long, for, without purposely abstaining from food, he could not eat, becoming at last so feeble and emaciated that he had to be carried to the scaffold. After his sentence was pronounced he asked if Saloo Meeya's father could be induced to visit him. I am glad to say the father went. The scene was, I was told, a most affecting one, the father always insisted afterwards that "Suliman Baba did not mean to do it—he was mad; it was all 'nusseeb' (fate)." And, indeed, I myself believe the man was mad, just as those ladies are mad who, without rhyme or reason, secrete things in shops. I doubt, however, if a more horrible case of kleptomania has ever occurred.



SULIMAN'S FATE.

CHAPTER X.

MURDER FROM JEALOUSY.—MURDER FROM INFIDELITY.

It is scarcely necessary to dwell at any length on those classes of crime which are neither more numerous in India than they are in England, nor peculiarly characteristic of Indians.

A month's issue of such delectable evening papers as the *Star* or *Evening News* probably record as many horrible murders by jealous husbands, wives, and lovers as are to be heard in all India in six months.

As a matter of fact, it would probably be found that in India, jealousy, whether on the part of the husband, or on the part of the lover of his mistress, is satisfied by some horrible mutilation, and stops short of taking the victim's life. Time was, and not so many years ago, that the common punishment in India for infidelity was cutting off the nose of the frail wife or paramour; in the fewer cases now recorded, the bludgeon or the knife seems to be more commonly used. There is no greater ferocity displayed in Bombay or Calcutta than in the slums of London or Paris, where most ruffians carry a knife

or revolver, and use it freely, while those who do not possess a weapon find their hobnailed boots quite as efficacious. Amongst the better classes in India, such cases as we have recently read of in Europe are of the rarest occurrence, while there is no morbid eagerness or disposition to find extenuating circumstances by Judge, Juror, or Assessor.

Those—and there are many officials who ought to know better—who assert that infidelity in the conjugal relations is commoner in India, that the standard of morality is lower there than in Europe, grossly libel the people of India, especially the rural population. It is not a pleasant topic to dwell upon; but I am forced of my own knowledge and observation, and from what I have learnt from rural residents of all classes, to declare that immorality is general in most agricultural districts in England, where immoral connections are not merely tolerated, but accepted as almost a matter of course.

The very language used habitually by the women of the labouring classes in England among themselves betokens a depravity which I have never found among the “ryots.” The women of an Indian family are rarely alone during the daytime, at night they usually sleep together; there are not those facilities for intrigue that exist in England, and overcrowding—promiscuous overcrowding at night, such as is common in many English cottages—is unknown.

It is when the Indian village girl, leaving her native village, joins some factory in the larger towns, or some body of labourers on a large public work.

that she becomes contaminated by the abundance of temptation and opportunity.

The police have ordinarily no difficulty in tracing the perpetrators of crimes of this class; their work is cut out for them. The jealous husband rarely attempts to evade justice, or, if he tries to escape, is easily followed; there is rarely premeditation, and no preparations for escape have been made. The jealous wife usually resorts to poison, peppers the evening meal liberally with arsenic, and perhaps kills off half the unsuspecting household. The dissipated young fellow in a town, madly infatuated by some (to him) fascinating woman of the place, excited by drink or "bhang," stabs her to the death, and is caught red-handed.

The experience of most Indian police officers must be, like my own, that in ninety per cent. of the murders from jealousy, women of the town are the victims. Still, there are always instances of women murdering their husbands, or aiding in their murder by paramours.

The worst case I ever knew I will briefly relate; the actual details are too horrible for publication. I will call it—

"THE FATE OF QUILP."

Bhági was married to a man much older than herself, a misshapen, evil-tempered "sootar," or carpenter; very dissolute, and a drunkard, but withal a very skilful workman when sober. Sonoo strongly reminded me, in appearance, and especially

in feature, of the illustrations of Quilp in Dickens' celebrated novel. Like Quilp, he would purposely absent himself from his wife ; when with her, he had a fiendish delight in torturing and maltreating her generally ; thus, he had branded her on various parts of her body, had cut her about here and there with his adze, and on one occasion had chopped off one of her big toes. There were, happily, no children.

Sonoo was constantly employed on public works, in and out of Bombay, as a "maistree," or foreman carpenter, and a fine young fellow called Dhondoo, a carpenter from the same village, usually worked in his gang. Bhági and Dhondoo had known each other from childhood, an illicit connection existed between them, which Sonoo had just begun to suspect, when the gang was employed in the erection of a railway station on the B. B. and C. I. Railway. Full of drink, and infuriated by jealousy, Sonoo returned to their temporary hut one evening, knocked Bhági down with a mallet and gagged her, then heating one of his smaller tools red-hot, he deliberately scored a kind of pattern on her buttock. On going to work next morning he swore that when he came back he would cut her nose off !

Bhági was not seriously injured on this occasion, but she was firmly convinced that Sonoo meant to carry out his threat. She managed to communicate with Dhondoo in the course of the day, and they determined on Sonoo's (Quilp's) fate for that evening.

Dhondoo, after sundown, secreted himself in the hut, armed with a stone-mason's hammer. Quilp,

who had probably been drinking himself up to the necessary pitch, was late, and at once accosted Bhági in his usual ferocious manner. Dhondoo, stepping from his hiding-place, felled him to the ground with a blow on the back of his head. The pair then turned him round, Bhági, seating herself on his mouth and holding his hands, looked on, while Dhondoo tore the wretch's clothes from his body and kneaded him on the chest and ribs with his knees, winding up by otherwise mutilating him with the stone hammer in a manner too horrible to describe.

Quilp had probably been killed by the first blow. The lovers, waiting till all signs of life were extinct, by which time the camp was buried in sleep, carried the body to one of the numerous small "chunam" (or lime) kilns burning near, and thrust it in, head foremost. When discovered next morning, the head and shoulders were nearly consumed, but there was no difficulty in identifying Quilp's crooked legs.

I wonder if a French jury would have found "extenuating circumstances"? Dhondoo, I know, was hanged, exulting in what he had done, but Bhági got off with a long term of imprisonment.

It will be a relief to my readers, as to me, to leave the subject of murder for a time, in order to deal with forgery and perjury, the particular offences which are, if we are to believe some Indian Judges, especially rampant in India.

N.B.—This story is altogether too horrible to illustrate.

CHAPTER XI.

FORGERY AND PERJURY.

IN considering these crimes it is difficult to separate forgery from its helpmeet perjury. Forgery always depends upon perjury to support and carry it to a successful issue.

Perhaps it will be convenient to deal first with perjury in its isolated form, as it presents itself to every public officer in India, from the police superintendent upwards, at every step of almost every investigation. False evidence for or against a prosecution—false evidence in support of or against a claim for money or property—false evidence, material or immaterial, to any point at issue, is to be met with and guarded against in every case; but the worst of all false evidence is that which results from what is commonly known as the “tutoring” of witnesses by the police.

I am afraid I must declare my belief that “tutoring” is commonly resorted to in India. Good cases are often broken down by being bolstered up, in what the police imagine are weak points, by false usually, unnecessary evidence. Bad cases are often supported by false evidence so cleverly con-

cocted that the innocent are not infrequently found guilty. The motive may be excess of zeal, or, it may be, anxiety to support the known views, or even the supposed desire, of an official superior. Hundreds of such instances will occur to the mind of every Police Superintendent, Magistrate, or Judge. This, the besetting sin of the Indian Police, it must be admitted, is almost unknown in England. It was increasing when I left India, it is unlikely that it will diminish till the whole Police system shall have been reformed.

Putting aside, however, perjury of this dangerous character as peculiar to India, is there any sound basis for the generally expressed official belief that other perjury is more common in India than in England?

I am one of those who, with all my Indian experience behind me, have had special opportunities in later years of studying police cases of every kind in England, of hearing what barristers and solicitors say of the civil cases in which they are concerned. The daily journals teem, too, with cases in which false swearing on one side or the other, or both, is palpable, while judges inveigh, in vain, from the bench against the prevalence of perjury. Has there ever been a worse case in India than what is known as the "Hurlbert case," to say nothing of several more recent instances of perjury in connection with will suits? Has there ever been more wholesale perjury than in the Tichborne, commonly known as the "Claimant's case"? or the Piggott part of the *Times*'

Commission, which combined forgery with false swearing?

I have been thrown in intimate contact with the English agricultural classes, and find them quite as much, if not more, addicted to lying as my old friend Bhow Patel or Bappoo Kunbi in India.

The fact is, that "service men" go out to India young, without any experience of their own countrymen; at first, from the very nature of their duties, seeing only the seamy side of native character, they become impressed with the belief that those around them have no regard for veracity—a belief so strong that a subsequent better knowledge can hardly eradicate it.

Professional men and those connected with mercantile pursuits, on the other hand, similarly ignorant of their own land, and also going out in their youth, live in large cities or stations, know nothing, or next to nothing, of the languages, and have little communication with non-English-speaking natives, and that little through the interpretation of their clerks.

Few, very few of us get to know anything of the masses of natives, their habits, their modes of thought, their inner lives. Betwixt us and them "there is a great gulf fixed," and we are apt in our self-conceit and ignorance to judge rashly, usually failing to perceive that the poor people around us have very many good qualities that should command our respect. Somehow or other it has become a settled belief that natives are habitually liars, and in the

courts of law indulge the propensity with the utmost freedom. We do not know how often the native does not rightly understand his questioner; how very easily he is confused, or made to say (or misinterpreted to say) what he does not really mean.

The imperturbable Briton, though of the strictest veracity, can be and often is shown up to public scorn when in the witness-box, can be made to contradict himself and appear bent upon prevarication; *he* is being examined by his own countryman, in his own language. The native witness is often in the hands of a cross-examiner who imperfectly understands him, and has to take his evidence at second-hand. Why should we always jump to the conclusion that the native witness is bent on perjuring himself? Why not make as much allowance for the native as for the Englishman?

We come to be more charitable when we get older, and have left the East for good. We find, when it is too late, from what we see of our own countrymen and women, that we must often have judged very harshly and uncharitably in India. It is not a pleasant retrospect.

But if it is unfair exaggeration to assert that wholesale perjury is peculiarly rife in India, it is unfortunately too true that it is the land of forgers. Not that the crime prevails among, or is practised by, the people generally; it is the work of the higher castes, of the educated classes necessarily, it exactly suits the genius of the wily Brahmin.

The constant change in the *personnel* that sur-

rounded the Peishwa's Court, the constant rise and fall among the subordinate chiefs, the constant shifting of power and influence, the "sanads" and counter "sanads" (deeds or grants) produced a chaos which it has taken many years of British rule to reduce to order. Never perhaps has Brahminical intrigue had a wider and a richer field to revel in than that afforded by the British Government, from the downfall of Bajirao to the termination of the inquiries by the hated Inam Commission. Even then a vast number of cases of titles or of claims to grants of land or money remained unsettled, while others were allowed to be reopened on grounds more or less well founded. It would be highly interesting to know how many palpably forged documents, how many tainted deeds, were produced before the various tribunals between 1820 and 1860.

Then or about that time came a flood of legislation connected with suits for money and various changes in the stamp laws, which have yielded an abundant harvest to a class of men ever on the watch for their opportunity. One of the ablest Judges once assured me that every change in the law with reference to limitation of suits, to stamps, or even to registration, produces a "flush of forgery" throughout the Presidency. How far that may be true, whether it be an exaggeration, I leave judicial experts to determine.

The police are not usually called upon to act in cases of perjury or forgery, except when these crimes crop up in the course of the investigation of a con-

spiracy for some other nefarious purpose. The perjurer is, or can be, committed for trial by the Court before which the offence is discovered. The forgery is commonly brought to light in a court of justice or before some tribunal, which impounds the suspected document, and refers the case to the magistrate.

I remember, however, one notable case in which the police under me were employed with considerable success in unearthing an organised gang of forging swindlers. If my memory serves me right, it was somewhere about 1860 or 1861 when an Act was passed, the effect of which was to prevent the filing of suits for the recovery of money on unstamped bonds after a certain date. The same sort of thing must have occurred all over the country, but, to the best of my belief, no formal inquiry was instituted elsewhere.

The Judge of the district in which I was then serving—who was conspicuous for his remarkable knowledge of the vernacular and his intimate acquaintance with native life and character—was struck, first of all, by the enormous number of suits filed on unstamped bonds for petty sums in a particular subdivision of his jurisdiction. He next noticed, as they came up before him in shoals on appeal, that for some time it was invariably the defendant who appealed against the decree of the Lower Court, and that all he could allege in the face of an apparently clear case against him was, that the bond was a forgery and that he was not indebted.

Very soon, however, he observed that the appellant

was usually the original plaintiff, who, having been non-suited because of the defendant proving repayment or producing and proving a receipt, alleged that the receipt was a forgery.

Quietly analysing the cases for a few months he found that in all such cases the plaintiff was one of some eighteen money-lenders; that the same vakils were always employed in the Court below; that latterly the defendants were always represented by two well-known rival vakils in the same Court!

The Judge thereupon represented the facts and his suspicions confidentially to the magistrate, and in due course I was instructed to take the matter up. It was no easy matter to decide how to act, for I had no clue but the Judge's suspicions. After some weeks, however, I learnt enough through the hangers-on to the particular sub-judge's court (Moon-siff he was called in those days) to convince me that one of the eighteen plaintiffs was at the head of the conspiracy, so I took my chance of finding something useful in searching his house. It was not a very irregular proceeding, but we *had* sometimes to be irregular in those days.

The result was beyond my expectations. The police found a "roomal," or bundle, not even hidden away, in which there was a kind of rough diary and a list of persons who had been, or were to be, victimised, with a few details as to their means and ability to pay, and their deceased fathers' names and dates of death, if the son was to be sued on his father's bond. There were plenty of letters from the

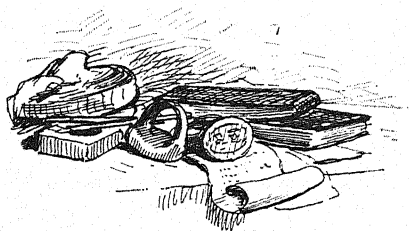
partners in the fraud, and a few from the vakils they employed, sufficiently incriminating them. Indeed, there was no attempt at concealment. Some of the letters discussed what should be done now that the two other vakils had hit upon the dodge of putting in forged receipts, or of proving payment by "good" witnesses. Lastly, there was a good supply of spare paper bearing the signs of age.

The matter then passed out of my hands, and the Judge came down on circuit and held a departmental inquiry. I left the district about that time, but afterwards heard that the four vakils had their "sanads" (or licences to practise) cancelled, and that the Moonsiff, an incapable old fool, was compulsorily retired. No doubt some of the "eighteen" were prosecuted, but with what result I do not know.

It came out that these eighteen villains, residing in different villages in the jurisdiction, used to meet periodically—"in committee," as it were—with a list of the persons whom they thought "good" for small amounts of ten, twenty, or fifty rupees. Other necessary particulars having been collected, the committee then decided who should be next sued, and for what amount; who of the eighteen should be the nominal plaintiff; who should write the bond, and who should witness it. Suitable paper was selected, and the bond was then drawn up. The signature of the victim was a simple matter enough, for he was invariably illiterate, and a ploughshare or some such symbol served as his mark. In Court the wretched victim was confronted by the evidence of the

nominal lender, of the man who wrote the bonds, and of the two witnesses to the payment and to his signature. He had no defence. The bond was often dated several years back, and it was useless for him to contend that it was a forgery.

The other vakils in the court, of course, soon scented the fraud, and two of them hit upon the expedient of proving payment in some cases by a receipt, written by some enemy of the "eighteen," in which the nominal plaintiff's signature was boldly



THE FORGERS' STOCK-IN-TRADE.

forged, and by the evidence of two false witnesses to the repayment; but in the majority of cases it was found sufficient to produce witnesses only. And so the game of "tit-for-tat" went merrily on, to the great contentment of the vakils, till the occupation of the wily eighteen was nearly gone, and the astute Judge blew up the conspiracy.

On another occasion my police, in searching the house of a young Brahmin for stolen jewellery, came across what must have been the stock-in-trade of his deceased father, a very notorious old rascal in his time, viz. three copper dies (fabricated, of course) of the seals of certain neighbouring chiefs, several

blank sheets of venerable-looking native paper, and a small book, in which the amiable old gentleman had evidently been practising various handwritings and signatures.

Not very long before I left the country, a complete set of false merchants' account-books extending over five years fell into my hands, but, that is another story, which will be found in its proper place later on.

CHAPTER XII.

DACOITY.

WHEN I first became connected with the police, dacoity still existed nearly as it is depicted in 'Pandurang Hurree' * and the stirring tales by Meadows Taylor. Sprinkled liberally about the country were well-known dacoit leaders, counting adherents in every village, or at least informants, among all but the highest castes. At every "Dusserah" festival in the month of October, in imitation of the practice of all great Maratha leaders, each band assembled secretly by night, at the summons of its acknowledged chief, in some deserted fort or temple, to settle a general programme of proceedings for the coming season's campaign; the names of the selected victims; the kind of booty expected; the probability of resistance, or of interference by the authorities (then held in no small contempt); modes of communication; of disposing of the booty; in short, every detail of the operations to be undertaken was solemnly discussed and decided.

New members were then admitted, and sworn to

* Re-edited by Sir Bartle Frere.

fidelity on the "kuttar," or dagger, or some other weapon or emblem; after the sacrifice of a fowl or a goat, usually to "Bhowanee," but frequently to some other patron deity, the band separated before cock-crow, and then began the season's dacoities, and a lively time for the police everywhere till the approach of the monsoon (annual rains), when the band reassembled, dividing the spoil, to repair each man to "winter quarters" in his own village.

The monsoon months were mostly given up to revelry and debauchery, but were also utilised for gathering information for the next "Dusserah" meeting.

The lower classes, the out-castes, did not drink habitually then as they do now, so the "Dusserah" meeting was a very solemn business, at which the strictest sobriety prevailed. Connected with every band were at least two "Gosais," "Bawas," "Faquirs," or other religious mendicants, who acted partly as their jackals, partly as their messengers, partly as their informants to give warning of the movements of the authorities, or of treachery within the ranks of the band itself. The author of 'Pandoorang Hurree' has admirably depicted these incarnate fiends in the ubiquitous and powerful "Gosai," who is one of the chief characters in the book.

There was usually a "sonar," or goldsmith, among the gang, by whom ornaments were soon melted down, and he was, generally speaking, quite honest towards his comrades; silken and other cloths were safely deposited with some friendly shopkeeper, but

in the end usually found their way fragmentarily to the many mistresses of the band.

“Receivers,” in the ordinary police acceptation of the word, there were none, and “honour among thieves” was almost religiously observed. Many “patels,” or headmen, were, of course, friendly, and the gang had many harbours of refuge, numerous strongholds to retreat to in rough country ; while individual robbers, if closely pursued, could always count on finding some friendly succour at hand, or on being, if not concealed, at least passed on to friendly hands, while pursuers were delayed or put on a false scent. Women idolised them for their lavishness, sympathised with them, gloried in their adventures, and acted as their scouts everywhere : all the odds were in favour of the fugitive and against the police.

Nevertheless, as the country settled down, the persistent and devoted zeal of the picked officers in the police (*they were picked in those days*), their untiring and ceaseless pursuit of dacoit leaders, and, above all, the generally strict enforcement of responsibility of villages under a well-known section of the Elphinstone Code, were gradually driving dacoit bands over British boundaries into Native States, when the wave of the great Mutiny swept down upon us, and immediately an epidemic of dacoity raged throughout the Western Presidency. The Bheel rising in Khandeish and Ahmednugger, the disquietude among the Kolis along the Ghauts, and the open rebellion of the Waghiris in the north put the

country in a ferment, every freebooter in Native States, especially along the long line of the "Moglai" (Nizam's Dominions), took courage, and resumed operations over the border with renewed ardour.

I remember in my own small charge there were no fewer than twenty-two dacoities in a single month. How order was at length restored, and at what cost of valuable lives to Government, must still be fresh in the minds of many yet serving in the Bombay Presidency.

One remarkable feature in the dacoities of those three or four troublous years was, however, that the ancient organisation of dacoity as above described was to a great extent destroyed, and, as I believe, survives now only in Central India and the worst governed Native States.

Every now and again, it is true, some Honia, or Tantia, or Hussan Khan bursts like a comet on the country, gathering to him a few reckless wretches. He succeeds in disturbing the country, and for a while leads the police an awful dance; but there is no strong tie between him and his followers, no such freemasonry and brotherhood, no such mutual confidence, as subsisted among the organised professionals of days gone by.

There is no honour among *these* thieves; they commonly betray each other, what booty they secure is no longer safe in the hands of any member of the band, to be honestly divided at some subsequent time, but is hastily shared, and disposed of at a fraction of its value to petty dealers

and shopkeepers, and even to wily Brahmins in the neighbourhood. Nay, more, it is a matter of common notoriety that these last-named immaculate gentlemen have of late years (to use a slang phrase) "put up" many of the dacoities and burglaries that have been committed by half-starved Kolis, Bheels, and the like, first of all working on their fears, exciting their cupidity, suggesting the victims, supplying information regarding them, and then, the robbery completed, appropriating the proceeds; afterwards, without the smallest compunction, if it suited their purpose, or to secure their own safety, indirectly betraying them into the hands of the police.

Does any one now doubt that the great dacoity at Panwell at a wedding feast was "put up" by Brahmins? or that all the poor devils of Kolis and others who were shot, or hanged, or transported during the 'so-called "Wasoodeo Bulwant Phadki Rebellion" some ten years ago were simple tools in the hands of Brahminical "Fagins"? These men were well known to, but could not be reached by, the police. Unless they are shamefully libelled, they continue to play the same game wherever opportunity offers up to the present day.

The halo of romance, such as it was, has been lifted from dacoity—one crime may be more daring, more brutal, more successful than another, and that is all; otherwise, the history of one dacoity of the present day is very much the history of all dacoities that occur, and a very dreary, commonplace history it is. I do not call to mind one case that

merits special notice for many years past, or that was not fully reported at the time in all the newspapers, but I remember a terrible instance of dacoit revenge, which will not be out of place in this chapter.

Before relating it I should like to add a few words in general commendation of the method adopted of late years by the Government in dealing with any recrudescence of dacoity on the appearance of men like Honia, Tantia, and many others whom it is unnecessary to mention. Nothing connected with police administration has more impressed the native mind, nothing has tended so much to repress this kind of crime, than the relentless, dogged manner with which known leaders have been hunted down through weeks and months and years.

But there is often too much deliberation, and a reluctance to sanction the only plan that will succeed; there is also a niggardliness in the matter of rewards. A very few weeks suffice to show whether the ordinary police staff of a district is equal to the often incessant and harassing labour of hunting down a gang of freebooters, and, above all, of securing the leader. This point being clear, no time should be lost in deputing to the district a special officer selected from among the numerous young officers who have shown aptitude for such service. He goes down to assist, not to supersede, the District Superintendent; he goes literally to hunt down the gang, or the man, by untiring pursuit, having at his disposal sufficient picked men, relying upon the hearty co-operation of the local police.

No District Superintendent I have ever heard of who was worth his salt has felt himself aggrieved in such a case—many of their own accord have asked for such assistance. The ordinary duties of an active Superintendent are much heavier than the public is aware of, therefore he absolutely needs extra assistance to cope with outbursts of crime of this character.

Then as to rewards; Government are given, or used to be given, to haggling over the amount to be offered. District Superintendents refrain from asking for enough, the Magistrate perhaps cuts that down, and Government “economise” still further, forgetful that an outlaw in the flush of his success is able to, and often does, outbid them in the quarters from which information may be obtained. Rewards are not very fruitful of results at any time, but to offer an inadequate reward is worse than useless, because it only brings ridicule on Government.

The energy, activity, and zeal of district police officers have done much to stamp out dacoity in the Western Presidency. A little more promptitude and generosity on the part of Government itself will work wonders, though the crime will always crop up now and again when circumstances favour it, and reckless men exist to take advantage of them.

A DACOIT'S REVENGE.

There must still be a few officers in Western India who remember the outbreak of the Bheels in October 1858, and how Bhagoji Naique (whose

career I hope soon to recount) opened the ball by shooting Captain Henry, the Superintendent of the Ahmednugger Police, in an affray near Sinnur ; how, with comparatively few exceptions, the majority



YESOO BHEEL.

of the Bheels abandoned their villages and took to dacoity under Bhagoji and sundry of his lieutenants.

At this time there was living in a village, on an important cross road in that neighbourhood, an old Bheel named Yesoo, a personal friend of Bhagoji. His village was a favourite camping-place for European officers on tour, by reason of a fine "tope"

(grove) of mango trees, and the existence of good quail and hare shooting in the vicinity. Yesoo saw much of them, both in the field and in his capacity of head watchman; he was a good old fellow all round, withal very amusing, and he had an evident predilection for Sahebs generally.

Yesoo, hearing that Bhagoji had determined to "go out," as it was termed—that is to say, to encamp in the jungles with all the followers he could collect—went to see him, and tried to dissuade him from so fatal a step. After Henry's death Yesoo refused to join the rebels, and in view of his age and a slight lameness, he was excused by them and left in peace, they never suspecting for a moment that he had completely thrown in his lot with the Sahebs, and was already secretly supplying the Magistrate with very valuable information as to the origin and progress of the outbreak.

His story was, that about six months before, an emissary of Nana Saheb, or of his notorious lieutenant, Tantia Topee, made his appearance in the neighbourhood—there were plenty of such emissaries about then, as we subsequently learned—that a meeting took place at or near the town of Sun-gumnair, between this emissary, a wealthy Purdèsi residing in the town, Bhagoji, the chief Bheel Naique, and Jimma Naique, the head of the Koli tribe along the Syhadri range of mountains; that it was arranged that immediately after the rains Bhagoji was to lead off with the Bheels; Jimma was to follow suit with the Kolis; and when the country

was thoroughly disturbed and ripe for it, Tantia Topee was to force his way southward through Khandeish with a well-equipped army and overrun the Deccan. The Purdèsi gentleman was to act as local agent and keep Tantia informed of the progress of events.

This story was otherwise corroborated (if I remember rightly) by intercepted correspondence. Bhagoji, true to his word, accordingly "led off" with his Bheels, and Jimma, no doubt, would have fulfilled his promise with the Kolis, but Government stepped in and raised a Koli corps on good pay all round—Jimma being made native commandant on large allowances—their duty being to pursue and capture Bhagoji!

It was far too good a thing for the Kolis to throw over. Of course, Jimma and Bhagoji had a perfect understanding, it was remarkable how unfortunate the Kolis were in always being *just* too late to catch the Bheels. Many a wild-goose chase was your humble servant led in vain pursuit of the nimble Bhagoji.

Tantia Topee, as all the world knows, *did* make his attempt to break into Khandeish, and was within an ace of succeeding. The Purdèsi, I fancy, soon discovered that the climate of Sungumnair would not long agree with him, for he disappeared on the first opportunity.

But to return to my story. One of Bhagoji's most trusty adherents in the early part of the so-called rebellion was one Hanmant, a young Bheel of some

influence in and around the neighbourhood of Yesoo's village. No reliable evidence of his having been in any of the subsequent fights with our troops, or of his having taken part in any particular dacoity, was on record, but he certainly led strong bodies of Bheels for Bhagoji, and in short he was very much wanted by the police. Subsequently, when Bhagoji's star was on the wane, and the amnesty was proclaimed, Hanmant returned and settled quietly down in his own village.

Yesoo, by this time, was well known to have been a Government informer, and indeed gloried in it. This, seemingly, did not affect Hanmant much; he attempted to renew the most friendly relations with Yesoo, would go over to see and chat pleasantly with the old fellow, tried to persuade him to bring his family over to his (Hanmant's) own village, with a view to a little shooting. But Yesoo was a wary old fellow, and kept the young man, as much as he could, at arm's length. Finding all attempts to conciliate old Yesoo, or to get him away from his village (where he was comparatively safe with his two sons and other Bheels in the Bheelwarra, or Bheel quarter) to be unavailing, Hanmant conceived and carried out the following diabolical plot.

Taking some fifteen or twenty of his own people, and a few more Bheels who had sworn to be revenged on Yesoo, he repaired one night to Yesoo's village, silently surrounded the Bheel quarter, and then sent one of his men to fire the village stackyard at the other side of the village. Just as he anticipated,